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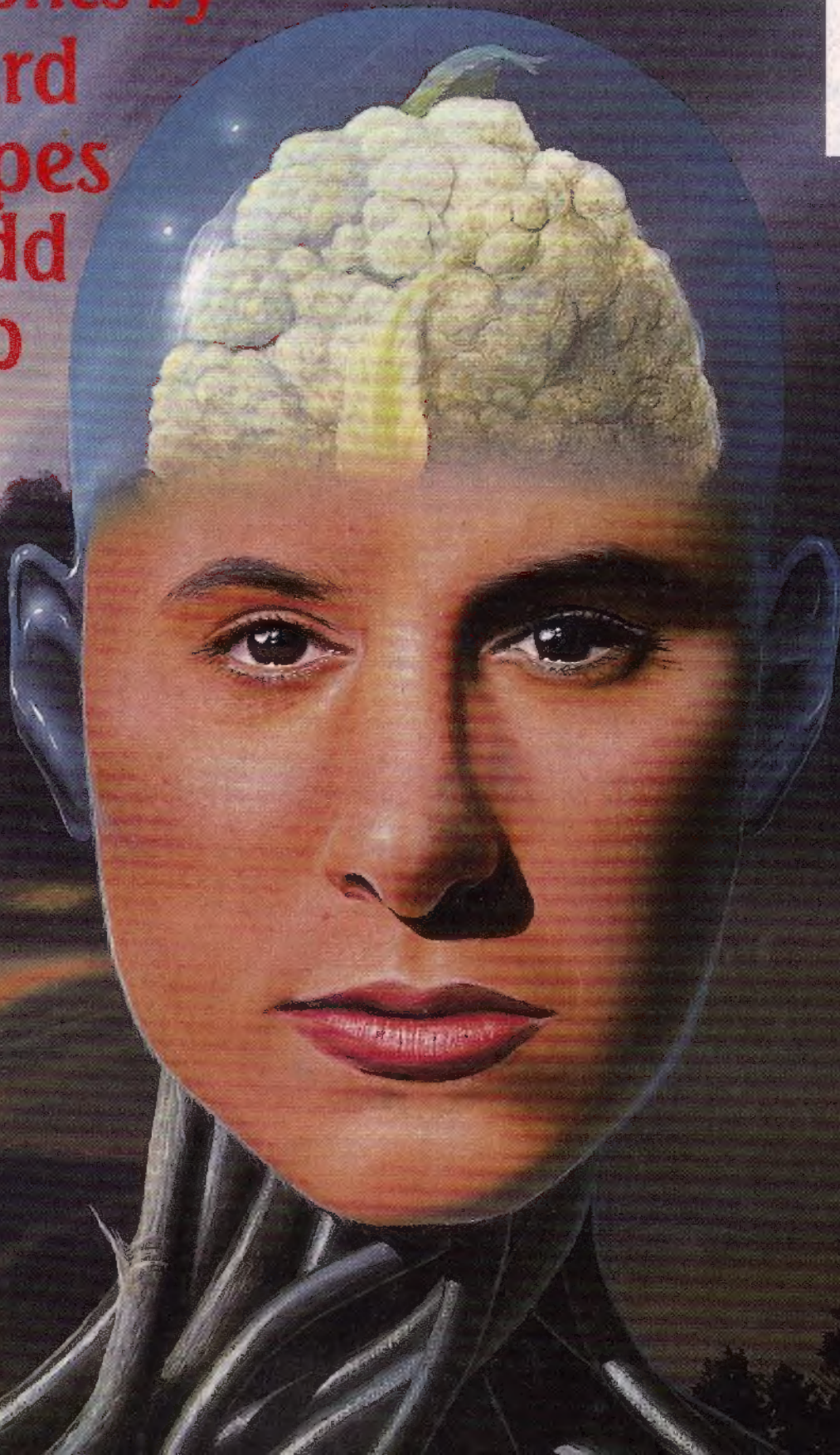
SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

FEBRUARY
1992

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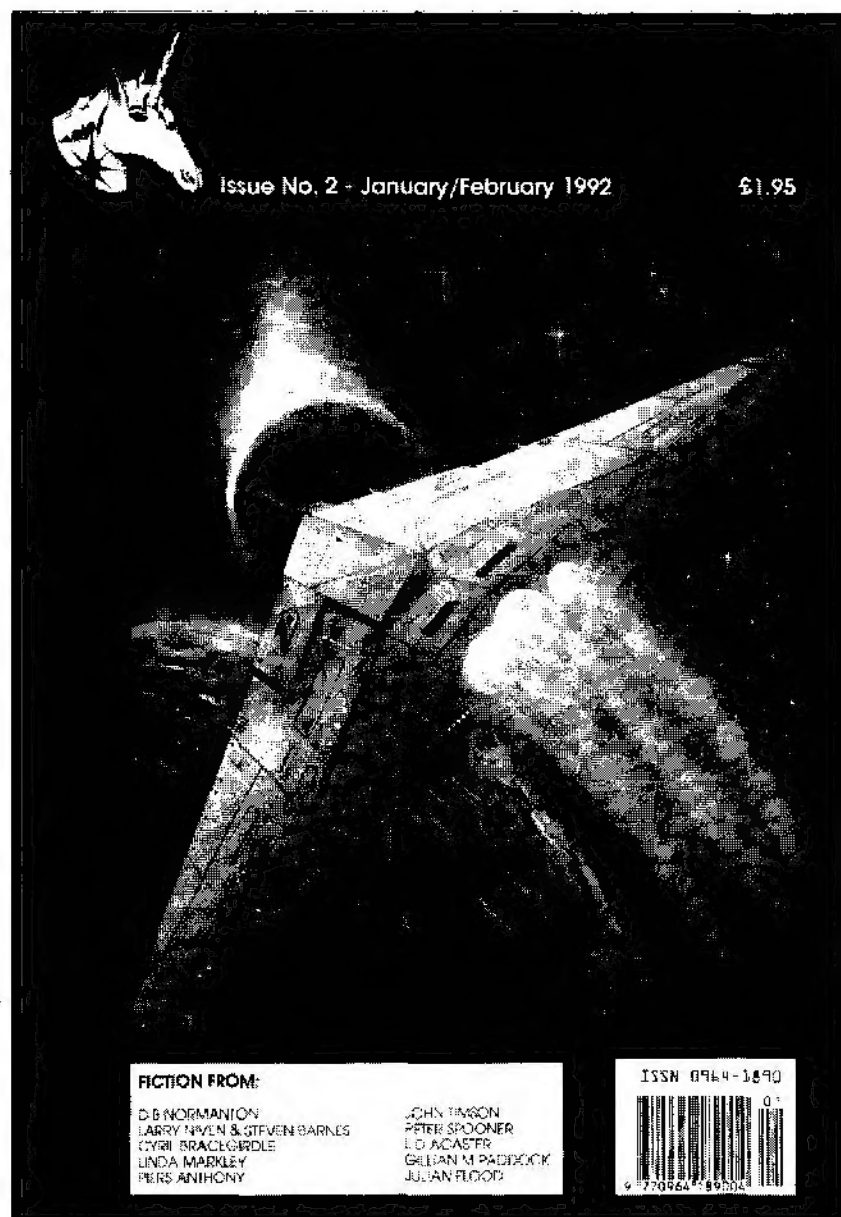
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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 56

February 1992

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Interface

David Pringle

In the past year or two we have received a good deal of mail from Eastern European countries – from the **USSR, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Czechoslovakia**. In all those nations there are people keenly interested in science fiction; they read English (and sometimes write it remarkably well), they have heard of *Interzone*, and they want to obtain copies of the magazine. Unfortunately, they usually have little money, or insurmountable exchange problems, and so their communications often take the form of “begging letters”: they want free subscriptions, old magazines, second-hand sf books, and so on.

In fact, used paperbacks seem to be a valuable form of currency for those who wish to deal with the former communist countries of the East: we received one English-language fanzine from Kiev, the **Ukraine**, which stipulates “five second-hand paperbacks” as its official subscription rate! We try to oblige these people, but time and resources severely limit what we are able to do for them. We are too busy producing a monthly magazine to be able to correspond with many of our Eastern European friends (or indeed with friends and wellwishers from elsewhere around the globe); nor can we afford to send out unlimited free copies of *Interzone*. But two thoughts occur to us:

(1) There's a vast public for science fiction and fantasy in the lands of Eastern Europe and the USSR. There are many highly educated people over there who read English and are fascinated by the forms of literature we publish. They may not be able to buy much of our “product” at present, but as the economies of their respective nations strengthen it's likely that they'll become a very important market for sf magazines and books. Isn't it in everyone's interest to scatter some seedcorn on such fertile ground?

(2) There's a limit to what we, the editors of *Interzone*, can do, but it may be that some of our readers would like to become directly involved in communicating with the sf fans of the East. Perhaps you would like to send them batches of old magazines and paperbacks; perhaps you could enter into correspondence with them on a regular basis – and maybe even consider taking out a gift subscription to *Interzone* on their behalf (I'm well aware that one or two of our British readers already do this – thanks!).

Let's Cooperate...

In order to facilitate all of the above, we'll publish the names and addresses of such Eastern European contacts on a more regular basis. We did in fact make a start last issue by publishing a letter from **Nicolae C. Arion** of Romania (see page 32 of IZ 55), who was offering his group's hospitality in the Danube Delta region to anyone who might be able to provide him and his friends with second-hand English-language sf books.

Another suggestion which has been made is that we consider publishing a “swap issue” (on the lines of our *Aboriginal SF* swap of last year) with some Eastern European magazine. For example, there has been a serious overture on these lines from someone in the Soviet Union. Again, our readers – particularly the many aspiring writers among you – could help. In order to publish some Russian-language sf we'd need the assistance of capable writers who are prepared to “English” such stories on our behalf. I don't mean that you'd necessarily need a working knowledge of Russian (although if anyone does have that it would be useful). What we'd need is a handful of helpers with the patience and flair to take an indifferently translated story and turn it into something more readable – to do the sort of job which **Lewis Shiner** did for us on Yoshio Aramaki's story “Soft Clocks” (IZ 27, from the Japanese) or that **Michael Moorcock** did on Josef Nesvadba's “The Store-room of Lost Desire” (IZ 30, from the Czech). Anyone interested?

Meanwhile, here's a short article which has been sent to us by **Ivan Adamovič**, editor of the Czechoslovakian sf magazine, *Ikarie*. I hope it goes to prove the points I made above about the strength of interest in sf, and particularly in British sf, which exists in Eastern and Central Europe:

News From Czechoslovakia

British sf has been having great success in the Czechoslovakian book market and among sf readers. The first two novels in the *Hitchhikers'* series by Douglas Adams were well received in a Czech translation as was a new edition of *The Day of the Triffids* by John Wyndham. This book was also the first correct version, as in the previous two Czech editions any mention of the Russians was censored.

In 1990 the first volume of J.R.R.

Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* was at last published. The translation had to wait ten years for a publisher and nobody knows why the publishers were so reluctant to publish this trilogy, which was already a cult favourite, passing from hand to hand in manuscript form. The second volume has now also been published and the third is due out in 1992 (!). Sf fans voted the first volume the best sf/fantasy book in translation in 1990.

In a wide poll of the readers of the Czech sf magazine *Ikarie* British sf novels overshadowed the American ones. In the category “foreign novel,” there were four British sf books among the first five: 1st place: John Wyndham – *The Day of the Triffids*, 2nd: B.W. Aldiss – *Non-Stop*, 3rd: Frank Herbert – *Dune*, 4th: A.C. Clarke – *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 5th: A.C. Clarke – *Rendezvous with Rama*. The *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (of which only the first volume had been published) took sixth place.

What is the other news in Czechoslovakia? The fandom movement is losing energy after the November 1989 revolution, but independent publishing houses are growing fast. Some well-known fans have founded their own publishing houses and they are providing strong competition to the great state-sponsored publishers. *Ikarie*, the first (and only, if we do not count two short-lived failed efforts) Czech sf magazine was founded in June 1990 and is doing well in the overstocked magazine market. It has already published such classic works as “The Saliva Tree” by B.W. Aldiss or “Behold the Man” by Michael Moorcock, while stories from *Interzone* have begun to appear too (M. Edwards – “After-Images,” E. Brown – “The Time-Lapsed Man,” D. Garnett – “Now Read On...”). The January issue of *Ikarie* will be an all-British issue with stories by G. Kilworth, C. Greenland, E. Brown and D. Garnett, and an article by Brian Stableford.

An ambitious Czech sf encyclopedia, which will list also many non-Anglo-American authors, seems to have found a new publisher at last. The previous publisher had refused to publish it after five years of preparations, fearing that there would not be a market for such a book. A first Czech language *Encyclopedia of Fantastic Films* is in preparation as well. (Those who would like to buy either of these two encyclopedias should write to: Ivan

Adamovič, *Ikarie*, DDMT, Radlická 61, 150 02 Praha 5, Czechoslovakia.)

I am pleased to add that a solid collection of Czech sf books has been gathered at the SF Foundation Library, East London Polytechnic, with the help of an sf fan, Cyril Simsa, and the "Friends of Foundation" organization.

(Ivan Adamovič)

The Publishing Roundabout

Magazines folding, publishing houses closing, editors being made redundant – the cheery news continues as the British recession, we hope, comes to an end. It's been a tough year. A few snippets: **Malcolm Edwards**, sf editor at HarperCollins (and Advisory Editor of *Interzone*), has been promoted to Publishing Director for Fiction, which presumably means he's in charge of the novels of Barbara Taylor Bradford and Robert Ludlum as much as he's in charge of sf and fantasy. As Chris Priest put it in the news-sheet *Ansible*: "Malcolm Edwards's empire is now almost of Austro-Hungarian extent. He will soon be permanently in meetings, emerging only to pick up his salary." Well done, Malcolm.

Jane Johnson, erstwhile sf editor at Unwin Hyman who was "bought" along with that company by HarperCollins, has also been promoted, to fill Malcolm Edwards's old place: so she's now the editorial director of all sf, fantasy and horror publishing at HarperCollins/Grafton Books. Congratulations to her. **Nick Sayers**, lately of Hodder & Stoughton/NEL (who published the *Interzone* anthologies among many other things), has also joined the HarperCollins team, as deputy publishing director for fiction.

So who have been losing jobs? Well, **Anthony Cheetham** for one; and, er, me. – Mr Cheetham is the erstwhile science-fiction editor (anyone remember his early-1970s anthologies from Sphere Books?) who built up Century Publishing, took over Hutchinson, then sold out to the American company Random House to create the massive Random Century Ltd (who publish the "Legend" sf-and-fantasy list). Until recently, he was one of the most powerful individuals in British book publishing. Now his U.S. masters have made him redundant. Apparently, his severance terms prevent him from starting any new publishing venture for at least a year. We shall see.

And, to move from the sublime to the ridiculous, **David Pringle** has been made redundant as editor of the GW Books list for Games Workshop Ltd. This was no great surprise: I'd been in the job for almost three years, and for the past year I had in effect been barred from commissioning any new books. Actually, I'm grateful to GW for keeping me on the payroll as long as they did. We published about 18 books while I was there, among them some

very good quickies by Brian Stabelford, Ian Watson and "Jack Yeovil" (Kim Newman). Sadly, GW were unable to market the novels as effectively as they would have liked – they never did get the necessary infrastructure in place – and several titles remain in unpublished limbo, including Watson's excellent *Space Marine* and Yeovil's remarkable *Genevieve Undead*. GW say that they hope to revive the line one day and bring these books among others into print. Again, we shall see. (David Pringle)

Interaction

Dear Editors:

Oh really! Geoffrey Landis' "Paradigms of Change" (IZ 53) a story at "the boundary of imaginative writing"? Come on. Characters like cartoons, no plot, a "whaddaya mean there's no twist?" theme, and a narrative point of view that skips aimlessly between infodumping, pure omniscience and cringingly pseudo tele-reportage. Could have been, I suppose, an interesting montage, ends up an old-fashioned mess.

But look at Ian MacLeod's "The Family Football." Now there, on the other hand, is a story and a half. Interesting, well-plotted, very funny, even moving. Its problem is that it would work just as well minus the fantasy elements, but I'm not complaining. Right back to Ian Watson's "Jingling Geordie's Hole" in IZ 17, I have loved this peculiar "funny stuff in the suburbs" sub-genre. It's traceable to the American fifties, with all those Bradbury "Mushrooms in the Cellar" stories, and probably beyond, but in its British manifestation it represents something we do at least as well as the Americans. Good, quirky, observation of setting, solid characters, and it even ends on an emotional up. What more can anyone possibly want?

Well, J.G. Ballard obviously disagrees. "Neil Armstrong..." had wonderful, authoritative prose; but, to my eyes at least, was actually completely incoherent. Still, he's J.G. Ballard, and I'm me, so I'll nod respectfully and move swiftly on to Alan Heaven's "The Hauler-In Susie M." Which I loved. A little opaque, which I am not sure was entirely desirable in the circumstance, but it sure was good. Real writing.

I'll leave the other two stories for someone else who likes this kind of thing. Except to say that they were dull. Very competent, very skilfully done, but how many times have we read them before? Anyway, "Susie M" and "The Football" made it an issue to be remembered. More of this please, and leave the mainstream stuff to the rest. **Philip Gladwin**
Brighton

Dear Editors:

I would just like to say how stunned and sickened I was after reading Alan Heaven's debut in *Interzone* 53: "The Hauler-In Susie M."

Congratulations, it has confirmed my long-running belief that sf is not dying, it's an alive and kicking beast. Although Mr Heaven's piece cannot be said to be "nice" fiction, it is certainly well-written fiction, it smacks you visually in the teeth, it's forceful. In my opinion the last few issues have been well worth my two-year subscription.

That is not to say the rest were bad, they were also excellent. Yes, it can be seen that recent pieces have seemed to be written gloomily, but what ultimately matters is that they are written well. Hopefully *Interzone*'s editorial policy is to publish only good fiction, be it up-beat, down-beat, fantasy, whatever, as long as it's entertaining. As Gardner Dozois says, people do read for entertainment; why is this so strange an idea? Whatever you do, try not to shape the material you publish to please certain readers, let the fiction shape the content – I'm sure well-written up-beat fiction will be published when it is written.

My only groan is that the graphic style of *Interzone* doesn't reflect its quality of content; it is stale and uninteresting. The illustrations are exceptional, the style isn't, a change is needed. Well, it's my only gripe. Don't change your editorial policy, just continue the excellent work.

Carl Hickman
Cambridge

Dear Editors:

Just a few comments on some points made in *Interzone* 53. I enjoyed reading the letters criticizing Paul Campbell and generally agree, the last thing IZ needs is a "Happy issue." I'm sure stories like "The Sculptor's Hand" (IZ 32) gave many readers amusement, and I found "Green and Pleasant Land" in the same issue both funny and disturbing. In order to find more such stories I recently ordered a large number of IZ back issues, making my collection nearly complete. Before I move on, let me mention "Culprits" (IZ 40), which gave me more laughs per page than Terry Pratchett, but only just!

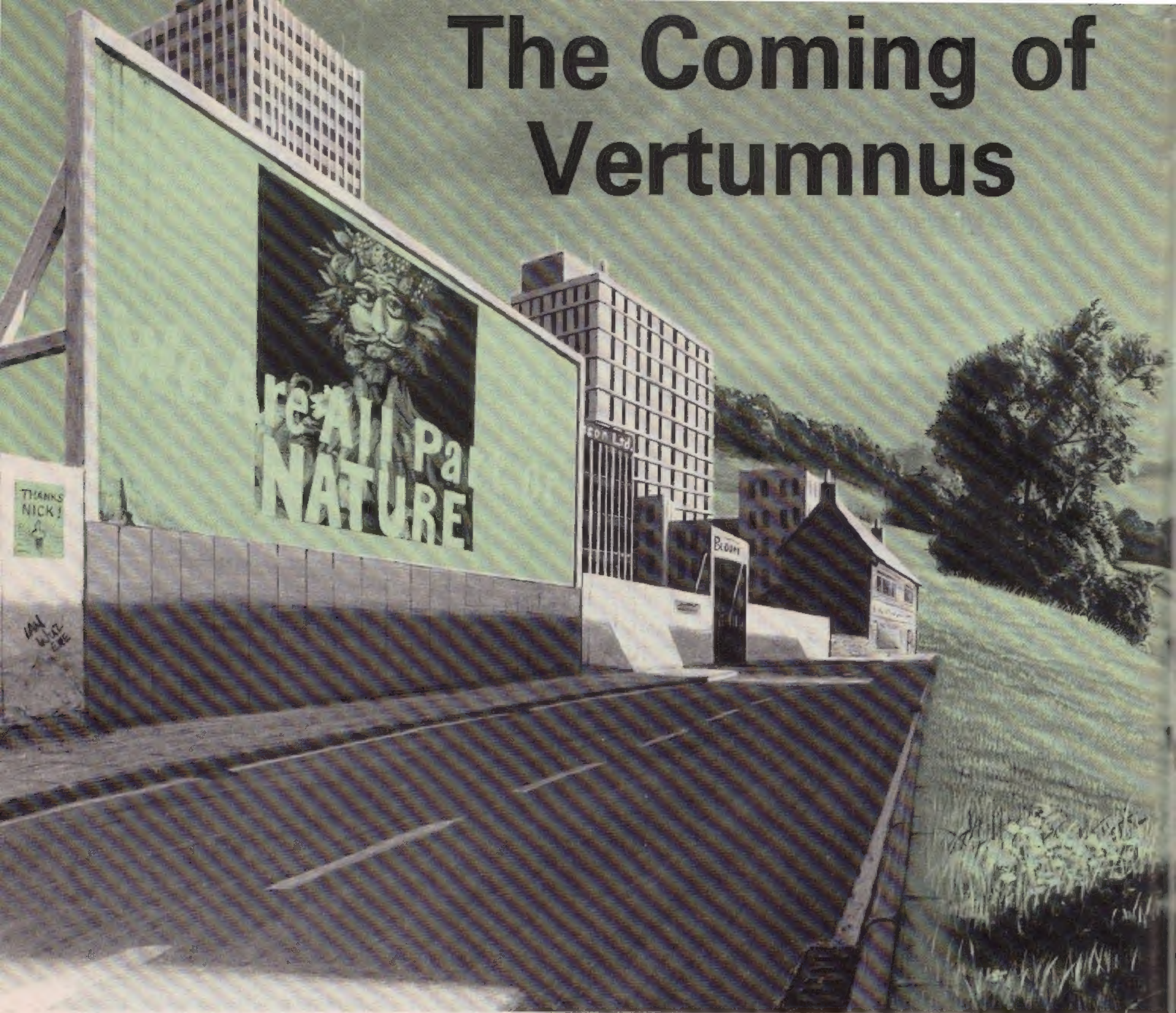
Oh, and just one word for Wendy Bradley: "Cobblers!" I greatly enjoyed S.P. Somtow's *Moon Dance*, which is surprising since normally I don't read horror.

I do, however, like your TV reviews. It's nice to know I'm not the only one to watch *The Next Generation*. Note that the Story Editor (now an Executive Script Consultant) is an sf writer!

Martin Rodgers
London

Continued on page 61

The Coming of Vertumnus



Do you know the *Portrait of Jacopo Strada*, which Titian painted in 1567 or so?

Bathed in golden light, this painting shows us a rich connoisseur displaying a nude female statuette which is perhaps eighteen inches high. Oh yes, full-bearded Signor Strada is prosperous – in his black velvet doublet, his cerise satin shirt, and his ermine cloak. He holds that voluptuous little Venus well away from an unseen spectator. He gazes at that spectator almost shiftily. Strada is exposing his Venus to view, yet he's also withholding her proprietorially so as to whet the appetite.

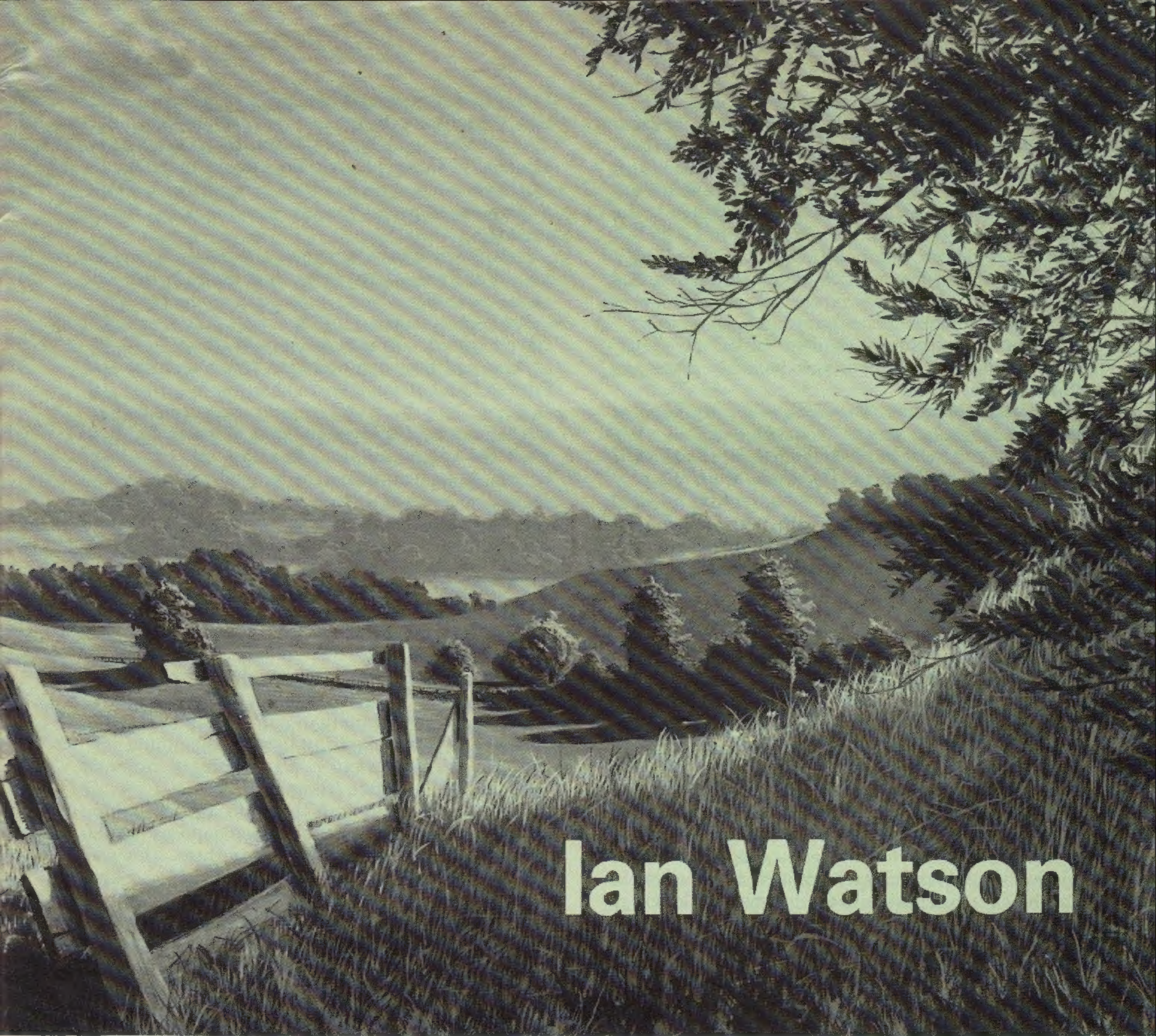
With her feet supported on his open right hand, and her back resting across his left palm, the sculpted woman likewise leans away as if in complicity with Strada. How carefully his fingers wrap around her. One finger eclipses a breast. Another teases her neck. Not that her charms aren't on display. Her hands are held high, brushing her shoulders. Her big-navelled belly and mons veneris are on full show. A slight crossing of her knees hints at a helpless, lascivious reticence.

She arouses the desire to acquire and to handle her, a yearning that is at once an artistic and an erotic passion. Almost, she seems to be a homunculus – a tiny woman bred within an alchemist's vessel by the likes of a Paracelsus, who had died only some twenty-five years previously.

I chose this portrait of Jacopo Strada as the cover for my book, *Aesthetic Concupiscence*. My first chapter was devoted to an analysis of the implications of this particular painting...

Jacopo Strada was an antiquary who spent many years in the employ of the Habsburg court, first at Vienna and then at Prague, as Keeper of Antiquities. He procured and catalogued gems and coins as well as classical statuary.

Coins were important to the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperors, because coins bore the portraits of monarchs. A collection of coins was a visible genealogy of God-anointed rulers. Back on Christmas Day in the year 800 the Pope had crowned Charlemagne as the first "Emperor of the Romans." The Church had decided it no longer quite had the clout to run Europe



Ian Watson

Illustrations by Jason Hurst

politically as well as spiritually. This imperial concoction – at times heroic, at other times hiccuping along – lasted until 1806. That was when the last Holy Roman Emperor, Francis II, abdicated without successor so as to thwart Napoleon from grabbing the title. By then, as they say, the Emperor presided over piecemeal acres which were neither an empire, nor Roman, nor holy.

History has tended to view the Habsburg court of Rudolph II at Prague in the late 1570s and 80s as wonky, wacky, and weird: an excellent watering hole for any passing nut-cases, such as alchemists, hermetic occultists, or astrologers – who of course, back then, were regarded as “scientists.” Not that true science wasn’t well represented, too! Revered astronomer Tycho Brahe burst his bladder with fatal result at Rudolph’s court, due to that Emperor’s eccentric insistence that no one might be excused from table till his Caesarian Majesty had finished revelling.

Botanists were very busy classifying plants there, and naturalists were taxonomizing exotic wildlife (of which many specimens graced Rudolph’s zoo) – just

as Strada himself tried to impose order and methodology upon ancient Venuses.

Strada resigned and quit Prague in 1579, perhaps in irritation that his aesthetic criteria held less sway over Rudolph than those of another adviser on the Imperial art collection – namely *Giuseppe Archimboldo*...

My troubles began when I received a phone call at St Martin’s School of Art in Charing Cross Road, where I lectured part-time in History of the Same. The caller was one John Lascelles. He introduced himself as the UK personal assistant to Thomas Rumbold Wright. Oil magnate and art collector, no less. Lascelles’s voice had a youthfully engaging, though slightly prissy timbre.

Was I the Jill Donaldson who had written *Aesthetic Concupiscence*? I who had featured scintillatingly on *Art Debate at Eight* on Channel 4 TV? Mr Wright would very much like to meet me. He had a proposition to make. Might a car be sent for me, to whisk me the eighty-odd miles from London to the North Cotswolds?

What sort of proposition?

Across my mind there flashed a bizarre image of myself as a diminutive Venus sprawling in this oil billionaire's acquisitive, satin-shirted arms. For of course in my book I had cleverly put the stiletto-tipped boot into all such as he, who contributed to the obscene lunacy of art prices.

Maybe Thomas Rumbold Wright was seeking a peculiar form of recompense for my ego-puncturing stiletto stabs, since he – capricious bachelor – was certainly mentioned once in my book...

"What sort of proposition?"

"I've no idea," said Lascelles, boyishly protesting innocence.

I waited. However, Lascelles was very good at silences, whereas I am not.

"Surely you must have some idea, Mr Lascelles?"

"Mr Wright will tell you, Ms Donaldson."

Why not? Why not indeed? I had always revelled in paradoxes, and it must be quite paradoxical – not to mention constituting a delicious piece of fieldwork – for Jill Donaldson to accept an invitation from Thomas R. Wright, lavisher of untold millions upon old canvases.

One of my prime paradoxes – in my "Stratagems of Deceit" chapter – involved a comparison between the consumption of sensual fine art, and of visual pornography. I perpetrated an iconography of the latter based upon interviews I conducted with "glamour" photographers on the job. No, I *didn't* see it as my mission to deconstruct male-oriented sexism. Not a bit of it. That would be banal. I came to praise porn, not to bury it. Those sumptuous nudes in oils of yore were the buoyant, respectable porn of their day. What we needed nowadays, I enthused – tongue in cheek, several tongues in cheek indeed – were issues of *Penthouse* magazine entirely painted by latterday Masters, with tits by the Titians of today, vulvas by Veroneses, pubes by populist Poussins... Ha!

I was buying a little flat in upper Bloomsbury, with the assistance of Big Brother Robert who was a bank manager in Oxford. Plump sanctimonious Bob regarded this scrap of property as a good investment. Indeed, but for his support, I could hardly have coped. Crowded with books and prints, on which I squandered too much, Chez Donaldson was already distinctly cramped. I could hold a party in it – so long as I only invited a dozen people and we spilled on to the landing.

Even amidst slump and eco-puritanism, London property prices still bore a passing resemblance to Impressionist price-tags. Perhaps eco-puritanism actually sustained high prices, since it seemed that one ought to be penalized for wishing to live fairly centrally in a city, contributing to the sewage burden and resources and power demand of megalopolis, and whatnot.

Well, we were definitely into an era of radical repressiveness. The Eco bandwagon was rolling. Was one's lifestyle environmentally friendly, third-world friendly, future friendly? The no-smoking, no-car, no-red-meat, no-frilly-knickers, sackcloth-and-ashes straitjacket was tightening; and while I might have seemed to be on that side ethically as regards the conspicuous squandering of megamillions on paintings,

I simply did not buy the package. Perhaps the fact that I smoked cigarettes – oh penalized sin! – accounted in part for my antipathy to the Goody-Goodies. Hence my naughtiness in exalting (tongues in cheek) such a symptom of unreconstructed consciousness as porn. Paradox, paradox. I did like to provoke.

How many lovers had such a tearaway as myself had by the age of thirty-one? Just three, in fact; one of them another woman, a painting student.

Peter, Annie, and Phil. No one at the moment. I wasn't exactly outrageous in private life.

Peter had been the prankster, the mercurial one. For his "God of the Deep" exhibition he wired fish skeletons into the contours of bizarre Gothic cathedrals, which he displayed in tanks of water. Goldfish were the congregations – was this art, or a joke? Several less savoury anarchistic exploits finally disenchanted me with Peter – about the time I decided definitively that I really was an art historian and a critic (though of capricious spirit).

Sending a Mercedes, with darkened windows, to collect me could have wiped out my street cred. Personally, I regarded this as a *Happening*.

Mind you, I did experience a twinge of doubt – along the lines that maybe I ought to phone someone (Phil? Annie? Definitely not Peter...) to confide where I was being taken, just in case "something happens to me..." I didn't do so, yet the spice of supposed danger added a certain frisson.

When my doorbell rang, the radio was bemoaning the death of coral reefs, blanched leprous by the extinction of the symbiotic algae in them. This was sad, of course, tragic; yet I didn't intend to scourge myself personally, as the participants in the programme seemed to feel was appropriate.

The driver proved to be a Dutchman called Kees, pronounced Case, who "did things" for Rumby – as he referred to Thomas Rumbold Wright. Athletic-looking and bearded, courteous and affable, Case wore jeans, Reeboks, and an open-necked checked shirt. No uniform or peaked cap for this driver, who opened the front door of the Merc so that I should sit next to him companionably, not behind in splendid isolation. Case radiated the easy negligence of a cultured bodyguard-if-need-be. I was dressed in similar informal style, being determined not to doll myself up in awe for the grand encounter – though I refused to wear trainers with designer names on them.

Although Wright maintained a corporate headquarters in Texas, he personally favoured his European bastion, Bexford Hall. This had recently been extended by the addition of a mini-mock-Tudor castle wing to house his art in even higher security. The *Sunday Times* colour supplement had featured photos of this jail of art. (Did it come complete with a dungeon, I wondered?)

The mid-June weather was chilly and blustery – either typical British summer caprice or a Greenhouse spasm, depending on your ideology.

As we were heading out towards the motorway, we soon passed one of those hoardings featuring a giant poster of Archimboldo's portrait of Rudolph II as an assembly of fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Ripe pear

nose; flushed round cheeks of peach and apple; cherry and mulberry eyes; spiky chestnut husk of a chin; corn-ear brows, and so on, and so on.

The Emperor Rudolph as Vertumnus, Roman god of fruit trees, of growth and transformation. Who cared about that particular snippet of art historical info? Across the portrait's chest splashed the Eco message, *WE ARE ALL PART OF NATURE*. This was part of that massive and highly successful Green propaganda campaign exploiting Archimboldo's "nature-heads" – a campaign which absolutely caught the eye in the most persuasive style.

These posters had been adorning Europe and America and wherever else for the best part of two years now. Indeed, they'd become such a radiant emblem of eco-consciousness, such a part of the mental landscape, that I doubted they would ever disappear from our streets. People even wore miniatures as badges – as though true humanity involved becoming a garlanded bundle of fruit and veg, with a cauliflower brain, perhaps.

Case slowed and stared at that hoarding.

"Rudolph the red-nosed," I commented.

Somewhat to my surprise, Case replied, "Ah, and Rudolph loved Archimboldo's jokes so much that he made him into a Count! Sense of humour's sadly missing these days, don't you think?"

My driver must have been boning up on his art history. The Green poster campaign was certainly accompanied by no background info about the artist whose images they were ripping off – or perhaps one ought to say "recuperating" for the present day... rather as an ad agency might exploit the Mona Lisa to promote tampons. (Why is she smiling...?)

"Those paintings weren't just jokes," I demurred.

"No, and neither are those posters." Case seemed to loathe those, as though he would like to tear them all down. He speeded up, and soon we reached the motorway.

Under the driving mirror – where idiots used to hang woolly dice, and where nowadays people often hung plastic apples or pears, either sincerely or else in an attempt to immunize their vehicles against eco-vandals – there dangled a little model... of a rather complex-looking space station. The model was made of silver, or was at least silver-plated. It swung to and fro as we drove. At times, when I glanced that way, I confused rear-view mirror with model so that it appeared as if a gleaming futuristic craft was pursuing us up the M40, banking and yawing behind us.

Down where my left hand rested I found power-controls for the passenger seat. So I raised the leather throne – yes indeed, I was sitting on a dead animal's hide, and no wonder the windows were semi-opaque from outside. I lowered the seat and reclined it. I extruded and recessed the lumbar support. Now that I'd discovered this box of tricks, I just couldn't settle on the most restful position for myself. Supposing the seat had been inflexible, there'd have been no problem. Excessive tech, perhaps? I felt fidgety.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" I asked Case.

"Rumby smokes in this car," was his answer, which didn't quite confide his own personal feelings, unless the implication was that these were largely irrelevant amongst Wright's entourage.

Case ignored the 60-mile-an-hour fuel-efficiency

speed limit, though he drove very safely in this cushioned tank of a car. He always kept an eye open well ahead and well behind as if conscious of possible interception, by a police patrol, or – who knows? – by Green vigilante kidnappers.

Bexford Hall was in the triangle between Stow-on-the-Wold, Broadway, and Winchcombe, set in a wooded river valley cutting through the rolling, breezy, sheep-grazed uplands.

The house was invisible from the leafy side road, being masked by the high, wire-tipped stone boundary wall in good repair, and then by trees. Case opened wrought iron gates electronically from the car – apparently the head gardener and family lived in the high-pitched gatehouse alongside – and we purred up a winding drive.

Lawns with topiary hedges fronted the mullion-windowed house. Built of soft golden limestone around a courtyard, Chez Wright somewhat resembled a civilian castle even before his addition of the bastioned, bastard-architectural art wing. A helicopter stood on a concrete apron. A Porsche, a Jaguar, and various lesser beasts were parked in a row on gravel. A satellite dish graced the rear slate-tiled roof, from which Tudor chimneys rose.

The sun blinked through, though clouds still scudded.

And so – catching a glimpse en route of several people at computer consoles, scrutinizing what were probably oil prices – we passed through to John Lascelles' office, where the casual piles of glossy art books mainly caught my eye.

Having delivered me, Case left to "do things"...

Lascelles was tall, willowy, and melancholy. He favoured dark mauve corduroy trousers and a multi-pocketed purple shirt loaded with many pens, not to mention a clip-on walkie-talkie. On account of the ecclesiastical hues I imagined him as a sort of secular court chaplain to Wright. His smile was a pursed, wistful affair, though there was that boyish lilt to his voice which had misled me on the phone. His silences were the truer self.

He poured coffee for me from a percolator; then he radioed news of my arrival. It seemed that people communicated by personal radio in the house. In reply he received a crackly splutter of Texan which I hardly caught.

Lascelles sat and scrutinized me while I drank and smoked a cigarette; on his littered desk I'd noted an ashtray with a cheroot stub crushed in it.

Lascelles steeped his hands. He was cataloguing me: a new person collected – at least potentially – by his non-royal master, as he himself must once have been collected.

Woman. Thirty-one. Mesomorphic build; though not exactly chunky. Small high breasts. Tight curly brown hair cropped quite short. Violet vampiric lipstick. Passably callipygian ass.

Then in bustling Rumby – as I simply had to think of the man thereafter.

Rumby was a roly-poly fellow attired in crumpled bronze slacks and a floppy buff shirt with lots of pockets for pens, calculator, radio. He wore scruffy trainers, though I didn't suppose that he jogged around his estate. His white complexion said otherwise. His

face was quizzically owlsh, with large spectacles – frames of mottled amber – magnifying his eyes into brown orbs; and his thinning feathery hair was rebellious.

He beamed, almost tangibly projecting energy. He pressed my flesh quickly. He drew me along in his slipstream from Lascelles' office down a walnut-panelled corridor. We entered a marble-floored domed hall which housed gleaming spotlit models. Some in perspex cases, others hanging. Not models of oil-rigs, oh no. Models of a Moon base, of spacecraft, of space stations.

Was Rumby a little boy at heart? Was this his den? Did he play with these toys?

"What do you think about space?" he asked me.

Mischief urged me to be contrary, yet I told him the truth.

"Personally," I assured him, "I think that if we cop out of space now, as looks highly likely, then we'll be locked up here on Mother Earth for ever after eating a diet of beans and being repressively good with 'Keep off the Grass' signs everywhere. Oh dear, we mustn't mess up Mars by going there the way we messed up Earth! Mess up Mars, for Christ's sake? It's dead to start with – a desert of rust. I think if we can grab all those clean resources and free energy in space, we'd be crazy to hide in our shell instead. But there's neopuritanism for you."

Rumby rubbed his hands. "And if Green propaganda loses us our launch window of the next fifty years or so, then we've lost forever because we'll have spent all our spunk. I knew you'd be simpatico, Jill. I've read *Aesthetic Concubines* twice."

"Concupiscence, actually," I reminded him.

"Let's call it *Concubines*. That's easier to say."

Already my life and mind were being mutated by Rumby...

"So how did you extrapolate my views on space from a book on the art market?" I asked.

He tapped his brow. "I picked up on your anti-repressive streak and the perverse way you think. Am I right?"

"Didn't you regard my book as a bit, well, rude?"

"I don't intend to take things personally when the future of the human race is at stake. It is, you know. It is. Green pressures are going to nix everyone's space budget. Do you know they're pressing to limit the number of rocket launches to a measly dozen per year world-wide because of the exhaust gases? And all those would have to be Earth-Resources-relevant. Loony-tune environ-mentalists! There's a religious fervour spreading like clap in a cathouse. It's screwing the world's brains." How colourfully he phrased things. Was he trying to throw me off balance? Maybe he was oblivious to other people's opinions. I gazed blandly at him.

"Jill," he confided, "I'm part of a pro-space pressure group of industrialists called The Star Club. We've commissioned surveys. Do you know, in one recent poll forty-five per cent of those questioned said that they'd happily give up quote all the benefits of 'science' if they could live in a more natural world without radioactivity? Can you believe such scuzzbrains? We know how fast this Eco gangrene is spreading. How do we disinfect it? Do we use rational scientific argument? You might as well reason with a hippo on heat."

"Actually, I don't see how this involves me..."

"We'll need to use some tricks. So, come and view the Wright Collection."

He took me through a security-coded steel door into his climate-controlled sanctum of masterpieces.

Room after room. Rubens. Goya. Titian. And other lesser luminaries...

...till we came to the door of an inner sanctum.

I half expected to find the Mona Lisa herself within. But no...

On an easel sat...a totally pornographic, piscine portrait. A figure made of many fishes (along with a few crustaceans).

A female figure.

A spread-legged naked woman, red lobster dildo clutched in one octopus-hand, frigging herself. A slippery, slithery, lubricious Venus composed of eels and catfish and trout and a score of other species. Prawn labia, with legs and feelers as pubic hair... The long suckery fingers of her other octopus-hand teased a pearl nipple...

The painting just had to be by Archimboldo. It was very clever and, mm, persuasive. It also oozed lust and perversity.

"So how do you like her?" asked Rumby.

"That lobster's rather a nippy notion," I said.

"It isn't a lobster," he corrected me. "It's a cooked freshwater crayfish."

"She's, well, fairly destabilizing if you happen to drool over all those 'We are part of Nature' posters."

"Right! And Archimboldo painted a dozen such porn portraits for private consumption by crazy Emperor Rudolph."

"He did?" This was astonishing news.

"I've laid hands on them all, though they aren't all here."

Rumby directed me to a table where a portfolio lay. Opening this, I turned over a dozen large glossy colour reproductions – of masturbating men made of mushrooms and autumnal fruits, men with large hairy nuts and spurting seed; of licking lesbian ladies composed of marrows and lettuce leaves...

"You researched all the background bio on Strada, Jill. Nobody knows what sort of things our friend Archy might have been painting between 1576 and 1587 before he went back home to Milan, hmm?"

"I thought he was busy arranging festivals for Rudolph. Masques and tournaments and processions."

"That isn't all he was arranging. Rudy was fairly nutty."

"Oh, I don't know if that's quite fair to Rudolph..."

"What, to keep a chained lion in the hall? To sleep in a different bed every night? His mania for exotica! Esoterica! Erotica! A pushover for any passing magician. Bizarre foibles. Loopy as King Ludo of Bavaria – yet with real power. The power to indulge himself – secretly – in orgies and weird erotica, there in vast Ratzen Castle in Prague."

I wondered about the provenance of these hitherto unknown paintings.

To which, Rumby gave a very plausible answer.

When the Swedes under the command of von Wrangel sacked Prague in 1648 as their contribution

to the Thirty Years War, they pillaged the imperial collections. Thus a sheaf of Archimboldos ended up in Skoklosters Castle at Bålsta in Sweden.

"Skoklosters Slott. Kind of evocative name, huh?"

When Queen Christina converted to Catholicism in 1654 and abdicated the Swedish throne, she took many of those looted art treasures with her to Rome itself – with the exception of so-called German art, which she despised. In her eyes, Archimboldo was part of German art.

However, in the view of her catechist (who was a subtle priest), those locked-away porn paintings were a different kettle of fish. The Vatican should take charge of those and keep them *sub rosa*. Painters were never fingered by the Inquisition, unlike authors of the written word. Bonfires of merely lewd material were never an issue in an era when clerics often liked a fuck. Nevertheless, such paintings might serve as a handy blackmail tool against Habsburg Emperors who felt tempted to act too leniently towards Protestants in their domains. A blot on the Habsburg scutcheon, suggesting a strain of lunacy.

The cardinal-diplomat to whom the paintings were consigned deposited them for safe keeping in the crypt at a certain enclosed convent of his patronage. There, as it happened, they remained until discovered by a private collector in the 1890s. By then the convent had fallen on hard times. Our collector relieved the holy mothers of the embarrassing secret heritage in return for a substantial donation...

"It's a watertight story," concluded Rumby, blinking owlishly at me. "Of course it's also a complete lie..."

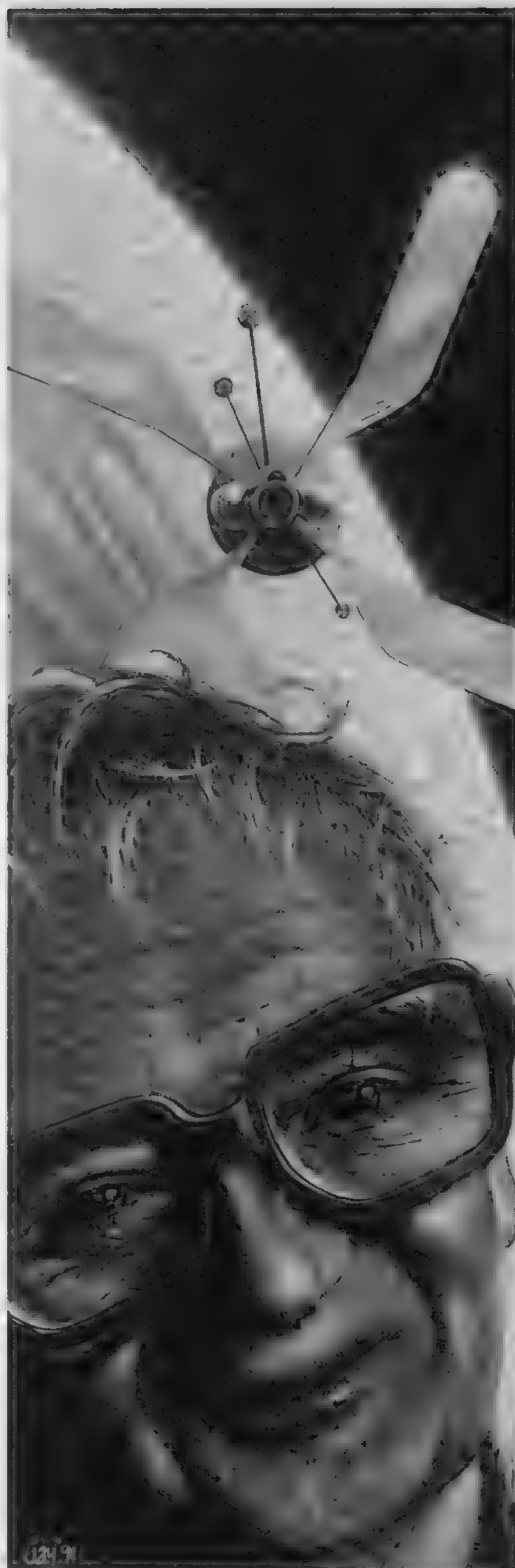
The dirty dozen Archimboldos were forgeries perpetrated in Holland within the past couple of years, to Rumby's specifications, by a would-be surrealist.

I stared at the fishy masturbatress, fascinated.

"They're fine forgeries," he enthused. "Painted on antique oak board precisely eleven millimetres thick. Two base layers of white lead, chalk, and charcoal slack..." He expatiated with the enthusiasm of a petrochemist conducting an assay of crude. The accuracy of the lipid and protein components. The pigments consisting of azurite, yellow lead, malachite... Mr Oil seemed to know rather a lot about such aspects of oil painting.

He waved his hand impatiently. "Point is, it'll stand up under X-ray, infra-red, most sorts of analysis. This is perfectionist forgery with serious money behind it. Oh yes, sponsored exhibition in Europe, book, prints, postcards, media scandal...! These naughty Archeys are going to fuck all those Green Fascists in the eyeballs. Here's their patron saint with his pants down. Here's what red-nosed Rudy really got off on. Nobody'll be able to gaze dewy-eyed at those posters any more, drooling about the sanctity of nature. This is nature – red in dildo and labia. A fish-fuck. Their big image campaign will blow up in their faces – ludicrously, obscenely. Can you beat the power of an image? Why yes, you can – with an anti-image! We'll have done something really positive to save the space budget. You'll write the intro to the art book, Jenny, in your inimitable style. Scholarly – but provocative,"

"I will?"



"Yes, because I'll pay you three quarters of a million dollars."

A flea-bite to Rumby, really...

The budget for this whole escapade was probably ten times that. Or more. Would that represent the output of one single oil well for a year? A month...? I really had no idea.

Aside from our crusade for space, smearing egg conspicuously on the face of the ecofreaks might materially assist Rumby's daily business and prove to be a sound investment, since he profited so handsomely by pumping out the planet's non-renewable resources.

"And because you want to sock Green Fascism, Jill. And on account of how this is so splendidly, provocatively perverse."

Was he right, or was he right?

He was certainly different from the kind of man I'd expected to meet.

Obviously I mustn't spill the beans in the near future. Consequently the bulk of my fee would be held on deposit in my name in a Zurich bank, but would only become accessible to me five years after publication of *Archimboldo Erotico*...

Until then I would need to lead roughly the same life as usual – plus the need to defend my latest opus amongst my peers and on TV and in magazines and wherever else. Rumby – or Chaplain Lascelles – would certainly strive to ensure a media circus, if none such burgeoned of its own accord. I would be Rumby's front woman.

I liked the *three quarters* of a million aspect. This showed that Rumby had subtlety. One million would have been a blatant bribe.

I also liked Rumby himself.

I had indeed been collected.

And that 750K (as Brother Bob would count it) wasn't by any means the only consideration. *I approved.*

As to my fallback position, should the scheme be – ahem – rumbled...well, pranks question mundane reality in a revolutionary manner, don't they just?

That was a line from Peter, which I half believed – though not enough to stage a diversion in the National Gallery by stripping my blouse off, as he had wished, while Peter glued a distempery canine turd to Gainsborough's painting, *White Dogs*, so as to question "conventions." I'd balked at that proposed escapade of Peter's ten years previously.

This was a political prank – a blow against an insidious, powerful kind of repression; almost, even, a blow for art.

Thus, my defence.

I took a copy of the erotic portfolio back with me to Bloomsbury to gaze at for a few days; and to keep safely locked up when I wasn't looking at it.

Just as well that Phil wasn't involved in my immediate life these days, though we still saw each other casually. I'm sure Phil's antennae would have twitched if he had still been sleeping with a strangely furtive me. Being art critic for the *Sunday Times* had seemed to imbue him with the passions of an investigative journalist. Just as soon as *Archimboldo Erotico* burst upon the scene, no doubt he would be in touch...I would need to tell lies to a former lover and ensure that "in touch" remained a phrase without physical substance. Already I could envision his

injured, acquisitive expression as he rebuked me for not leaking this great art scoop to him personally. ("But why not, Jill? Didn't we share a great deal? I must say I think it's damned queer that you didn't breathe a word about this! Very peculiar, in fact. It makes me positively suspicious...This isn't some kind of revenge on your part, is it? But why, why?")

And what would Annie think? She was painting in Cornwall in a women's artistic commune, and her last letter had been friendly...If I hadn't offended her with my porn paradoxes, then attaching my name to a glossy volume of fish-frigs and spurting phallic mushrooms oughtn't to make too much difference, unless she had become radically repressive of late...

In other words, I was wondering to what extent this escapade would cause a hindwards reconstruction of my own life on account of the duplicity in which I'd be engaging.

And what about the future – in five years time – when I passed GO and became three quarters of a dollar millionairess? What would I do with all that money? Decamp to Italy? Quit the London grime and buy a farmhouse near Florence?

In the meantime I wouldn't be able to confide the truth to any intimate friend. I wouldn't be able to afford intimacy. I might become some pursed-smile equivalent of Chaplain Lascelles, though on a longer leash.

Maybe Rumby had accurately calculated that he was getting a bargain.

To be sure, the shape of my immediate future all somewhat depended on the impact of the book, the exhibition, the extent of the hoo-ha...Personally, I'd give the book as much impact as I could. After all, I did like to provoke.

I returned to Bexford House a week later, to stay two nights and to sort through Rumby's stock of material about Archimboldo, Rudolph, and the Prague Court. I have a good reading knowledge of German, French, and Italian, though I'm not conversationally fluent in those tongues. Any book I needed to take away with me was photocopied in its entirety by Lascelles on a high-speed, auto-page-turning machine. Pop in a book – within five minutes out popped its twin, collated and bound. The machine cost twenty thousand dollars.

A week after that, Case drove me to the docklands airport for a rather lux commuter flight with him to Amsterdam, where I examined all the other Archimboldo "originals"; although I didn't meet the forger himself, nor did I even learn his name. The paintings were stored in three locations: in the apartment of Rumby's chosen printer, Wim Van Ewyck, in that of the gallery owner who would host the show, Geert De Lugt, and in a locked room of the Galerij Bosch itself. In the event of premature catastrophe, the entire corpus of controversial work (minus the fishy masturbatress at Bexford House) wouldn't be wiped out en masse.

Presumably the printer didn't need to be in on the conspiracy. What about the gallery owner? Maybe; maybe not...This, as Case impressed on me, was a subject which shouldn't even be alluded to – nor did Mijnheer de Lugt so much as hint.

The other eleven Archimboldos were even more

stunning at full size in the frame than in colour reproduction. And also more...appalling?

I returned to Bloomsbury to write twenty large pages of introduction. Less would have been skimpy; more would have been excessive. Since I was being fastidiously attentive to every nuance of the text, the writing took me almost three weeks, with five or six drafts. ("Put some feeling into it," Rumby had counselled. "Smear some vaginal jelly on the words.")

The task done, I phoned Bexford Hall. Case drove the Merc to London the same evening to courier the pages personally. Next day, Rumby phoned to pronounce himself quite delighted. He only suggested a few micro-changes. We were rolling. Our exhibition would open in the Galerij Bosch on the first of September, coinciding with publication of the book.

And of course I must attend the private showing on the last day of August - the vernissage, as it were. (I did hope the varnish was totally dry!)

While in Amsterdam, our party - consisting of Rumby and Case and Lascelles and myself - stayed in the Grand Hotel Krasnopolsky because that hotel boasted a Japanese restaurant, and Rumby was a bit of a pig for raw fish. I wasn't complaining.

We arrived a day early in case Rumby had any last minute thoughts about the layout of the show, or Case about its security aspects. So the morning of the thirty-first saw us at the Galerij Bosch, which fronted a tree-lined canal not far from where dozens of antique shops clustered on the route to the big art museums.

The high neck gable of the building, ornamented with two bounteous sculpted classical maidens amidst cascades of fruits and vegetables - shades of Archimboldo, indeed! - incorporated a hoisting beam, though I doubted that any crated paintings had entered the loft of the gallery by that particular route for a long time. Venetian blinds were currently blanking the three adjacent ground-floor windows - the uprights and transoms of which were backed by discreet steel bars, as Case pointed out; and already Mijnheer De Lugt, a tall blond man with a bulbous nose, had three muscular fellows lounging about in the large, spot-lit exhibition room. One in a demure blue security uniform - he was golden-skinned and moon-faced, obviously of Indonesian ancestry. The other chunky Germanic types wore light suits and trainers.

A high pile of copies of *Archimboldo Erotico* stood in one corner for presentation that evening to the guests: the media people, museum directors, cultural mandarins and mavericks. Particularly the media people.

And my heart quailed.

Despite all the gloss, mightn't someone promptly denounce this exhibition? We were in liberal Holland, where the obscenity in itself would not offend. Yet wouldn't someone cry "Hoax!"?

Worse, mightn't some inspired avant-garde type perhaps enthusiastically applaud this exhibition as an ambitious jape?

De Lugt seemed a tad apprehensive beneath a suave exterior. He blew that snuzzle of his a number of times without obvious reason, as though determined to be squeaky-clean.

"Ms Donaldson, would you sign a copy of the book for me as a souvenir?" he asked. When I had obliged, he scrutinized my signature as if the scrawly autograph might be a forgery.

Maybe I was simply being paranoid. But I was damn glad of this dry run amongst the exhibits.

Case conferred with the security trio quietly in Dutch. They smiled; they nodded.

The wet run that evening - lubricated by champagne to celebrate the resurrection of long-lost works of a bizarre master, and contemporary of Rabelais - went off quite as well as could be expected.

A young red-haired woman in a severe black cocktail dress walked out along with her escort in shock and rage. She had been wearing an Archimboldo eco-badge as her only form of jewellery, with the word Ark printed upon it.

A fat bluff bearded fellow in a dinner jacket, with an enormous spotted cravat instead of bow tie, got drunk and began guffawing. Tears streamed down his hairy cheeks till Case discretely persuaded him to step outside for an airing.

Rumby was bombarded by questions, to which he would grin and reply, "It's all in the book. Take a copy!" One of the great art finds, yes. Casts quite a new light on Archimboldo, that emotionally complex man.

So why had Mr Wright sprung this surprise on the art world by way of a private gallery? Rather than lending these paintings to some major public museum?

"Ah now, do you really suppose your big museum would have leapt at the chance of showing such controversial material, Ladies and Gentlemen? Some big city museum with its reputation to think about? Of course, I'll be perfectly delighted to loan this collection out in future..."

I was quizzed too. Me, in my new purple velvet couturier pant-suit.

Geert De Lugt smiled and nodded approvingly, confidently. Naturally Rumby would have paid him handsomely for use of his gallery, yet I was becoming convinced that Mijnheer De Lugt himself was innocent of the deception. He had merely had stage nerves earlier.

We stayed in Amsterdam for another five days. Press and media duly obliged with publicity, and I appeared on Dutch and German TV, both with Rumby and without him. So many people flocked to the Galerij Bosch that our Security boys had to limit admittance to thirty people at any one time, while a couple of tolerant police hung about outside. Our book sold like hot cakes to the visitors; and by now it was in the bookshops too. ("At this rate," joked Rumby, "we'll be making a fucking profit.")

During spare hours, I wandered round town with Case. Rumby mainly stayed in his suite at the Krasnopolsky in phone and fax contact with Bexford and Texas, munching sushi. I nursed a fancy that Chaplain Lascelles might perhaps lugubriously be visiting the Red Light District to let his hair and his pants down, but he certainly wasn't getting high on any dope. Me, I preferred the flea-market on Waterlooplein, where I picked up a black lace shawl and a slightly frayed Kashmiri rug for the flat back in Bloomsbury.

I noticed a certain item of graffiti on numerous walls: *Onze Wereld is onze Ark*.

"Our world is our Ark," translated Case.

Sometimes there was only the word Ark on its own writ even larger in spray-paint. I couldn't but recall the badge worn by that pissed-off woman at the party in the gallery. Pissed-off? No...mortally offended. Obviously, Ark was a passionate, punning, mispronounced allusion to...who else but Emperor Rudolph's court jester?

When I mentioned this graffito to Rumby, he almost growled with glee.

"Ha! So what do you do in this fucking ark of theirs? You hide, anchored by gravity – till you've squandered all your major resources, then you can't get to anyplace else. Sucks to arks."

We all flew back to England on the Sunday. At seven a.m. on the Monday the phone bullied me awake.

Lascelles was calling.

Late on the Sunday night, a van had mounted the pavement outside Galerij Bosch. The driver grabbed a waiting motorbike and sped off. Almost at once the van exploded devastatingly, demolishing the whole frontage of the building. As well as explosives, there'd been a hell of a lot of jellied petrol and phosphorus in that van. Fireworks, indeed! The gallery was engulfed in flames. So were part of the street and a couple of trees. Even the canal caught fire, and a nearby houseboat blazed, though the occupants had been called away by some ruse. The two security guards who were in the gallery on night shift died.

And of course all the Archimboldos had been burnt, though that seemed a minor aspect to me right then...

Case was coming pronto to pick me up. Rumby wanted us to talk face to face before the media swarmed.

Two hours later, I was at Bexford Hall.

Rumby, Lascelles, Case, and I met together in a book-lined upstairs study, furnished with buff leather armchairs upon a russet Persian carpet. The single large window, composed of stone mullions, seemed somewhat at odds with the Italianate plasterwork ceiling which featured scrolls and roses, with cherubs and putti supporting the boss of an electrified chandelier. Maybe Rumby had bought this ceiling in from some other house because it was the right size, and he liked it. The room smelled of cheroots, and soon of my Marlboro too.

"Let's dismiss the financial side right away," commenced Rumby. "The paintings weren't insured. So I'm not obliged to make any kind of claim. Hell, do I need to? The book will be the only record – and your fee stays secure, Jill. Now, is it to our disadvantage that the paintings themselves no longer exist? Might someone hint that we ourselves arranged the torching of the gallery before independent art experts could stick their fingers in the pie? I think two tragic deaths say no to that. Those poor guys had no chance. T. Rumbold Wright isn't known for assassinations. So, ghastly as this is, it could be to our advantage – especially if it smears the ecofreaks, the covenanters of the Ark."

What a slur on the ecofreaks that they might destroy newly discovered masterpieces of art for ideological reasons in a desperate effort to keep the artist pure for exploitation by themselves. When people saw any

Archimboldo badge or poster now, they might think, Ho-ho...I was thinking about the two dead guards.

Lascelles had been liaising with Holland.

"The Dutch police are puzzled," he summarized. "Is this an outburst of art-terrorism? A few years ago some people revived a group called the SKG – so-called 'City Art Guerillas' who caused street and gallery trouble. They never killed anyone. Even if the couple on that houseboat were kept out of harm's way to make the attackers seem more benign, De Lugt's two guards were just slaughtered..."

"Then what about these Ark people? The loony fringe of the Dutch Eco movement have gone in for destructive industrial sabotage – but again, they haven't caused any deaths. This is more like the work of the German Red Column, though it seems they haven't operated in Holland recently. Why do so now? And why hit the gallery?"

"To hurt a noted Capitalist, in the only way they could think of?" asked Rumby. "No, I don't buy that. It's got to be the Ecofreaks."

"The ecology movement is very respectable in Holland."

Rumby grinned wolfishly. "Mightn't be, soon."

"Ecology is government policy there."

How much more newsworthy the destruction made those naughty paintings! How convenient that they were now beyond the reach of sceptical specialists.

"I don't suppose," said I, "one of your allies in the Star Club might conceivably have arranged this attack?"

Drop a ton of lead into a pond.

"Future of the human race," I added weakly. "Big motivation."

Rumby wrestled a cheroot from his coat of many pockets and lit it. "You can forget that idea. Let's consider safety. Your safety, Jill."

I suppose he couldn't avoid making this sound like a threat, however benevolently intentioned – or making it seem as if he wished to keep my free spirit incommunicado during the crisis...

"Someone has bombed and murdered ruthlessly," said Rumby. "I'm safe here."

"Yes, you are," Case assured him.

"But you, Jill, you live in some little scumbag flat in any old street in London. I'd like to invite you to stay here at Bexford for a week or two until things clarify."

"Actually, I can't," I told him, with silly stubbornness. "I have a couple of lectures to give at St Martin's on Thursday."

"Screw them. Cancel them."

"And it isn't exactly a scumbag flat."

"Sorry – you know what I mean."

"At least until there's a communiqué," Lascelles suggested to me. "Then we'll know what we're dealing with. It's only sensible."

"Don't be proud," said Rumby. He puffed. The cherubs above collected a tiny little bit more nicotine on their innocent hands. "Please."

And some more nicotine from me too.

"You don't need to feed some goddam cat, do you?" asked Rumby.

"No..." In fact I loathed cats – selfish, treacherous creatures – but Rumby probably wouldn't have cared one way or the other.

In the event, I stayed at Bexford. Until Wednesday afternoon. No news emerged from Holland of any communiqué.

Could the attackers not have known about those two guards inside the gallery? So now they were ashamed, and politically reluctant, to claim credit?

Unlikely. You don't assemble a vanload of explosives and napalm and phosphorus, make sure there's a getaway motorbike waiting, and bail out the occupants of a nearby houseboat, without checking everything else about the target too.

Lascelles was stone-walling queries from the media. ("Mr Wright is shocked. He grieves at the two deaths. He has no other comment at present...") Stubbornly, I insisted on being driven back to Bloomsbury.

My little flat had been burgled. My CD player and my TV were missing.

Entry was by way of the fire escape door, which had been smashed off its none too sturdy hinges. Otherwise, there wasn't much damage or mess.

I hadn't wished Case to escort me upstairs; thus he had already driven away. Of course I could have reached him on the Merc's car phone. Yet this was so ordinary a burglary that I simply phoned the police. Then I thumbed the Yellow Pages for an emergency repair service which was willing to turn up within the next six hours.

The constable who visited me presently was a West Indian. A couple of other nearby flats had also been broken into the day before for electrical goods, so he said. Was I aware of this? He seemed to be pitching his questions towards eliciting whether I might perhaps have robbed myself so as to claim insurance.

"Fairly neat break-in, Miss, all things considered."

"Except for the door."

"You're lucky. Some people find excrement spread all over their homes."

"Did that happen in the other flats that were burgled?"

"Not on this occasion. So you reported this just as soon as you came back from — ?"

"From the Cotswolds."

"Nice part of the country, I hear. Were you there long?"

"Three days."

"Visiting friends?"

"My employer." Now why did I have to say that? Blurt, blurt.

"Oh, so you live here, but your boss is in the Cotswolds?"

"He isn't exactly my boss. He was consulting me."

The constable raised his eyebrow suggestively.

Obviously he believed in keeping the suspect off balance.

"You do have a lot of expensive books here, Miss," was his next tack.

Yes, rows of glossy art books. Why hadn't those been stolen — apart from the fact that they weighed a ton?

"I don't suppose the burglars were interested in art," I suggested.

He pulled out a Botticelli, with library markings on the spine, from the shelf.

"This is from a college library," he observed.



"I teach there. I lecture about art."

"I thought you said you were a consultant..."

By the time he left, I was half-convinced that I had burgled myself, that I habitually thieved from libraries, and that I was a call-girl who had been supplying sexual favours to Mr X out in the country. Would these suspicions be entered in the police computer? Did I have the energy to do anything about this? No, it was all so... tentative. Did I want to seem paranoid?

Bert the Builder finally turned up and fixed the door for a hundred and thirteen pounds... which of course the insurance would be covering. Otherwise the job would have cost just sixty, cash.

I did manage to look over my lecture notes - on Titian and Veronese. I microwaved a madras beef curry with pilau rice; and went to bed, fed up.

The phone rang.

It was Phil. He been calling my number for days.

These weird long-lost Archimboldos! Why hadn't I told him anything? And the terrorist attack! What had happened? Could he come round?

"Sorry, Phil, but I've just had my CD and TV nicked. And the helpful visiting constable thinks I'm a hooker."

I was glad of the excuse of the burglary.

Towards mid-morning my phone started ringing, and a couple of Press sleuths turned up in person, pursuing the art bombing story; but I stonewalled, and escaped in the direction of St Martin's where, fortunately, no reporters lurked.

At four in the afternoon I stepped out from the factory-like frontage of the art school into a Charing Cross Road aswarm with tourists. Beneath a grey overcast the fummy air was warm. A sallow Middle Eastern youth in checked shirt and jeans promptly handed me a leaflet advertising some English Language Academy.

"I already speak English," I informed the tout. He frowned momentarily as if he didn't understand. No points to the Academy.

"Then you learn cheaper," he suggested, pursuing me along the pavement.

"Do not bother that lady," interrupted a tall blond young man dressed in a lightweight off-white jacket and slacks.

"No, it's all right," I assured my would-be protector.

"It is not all right. Any trash is on our streets. They are not safe."

He waved, and a taxi pulled up almost immediately. The young man opened the door, plunged his hand inside his jacket, and showed me a small pistol hidden in his palm. Was he some urban vigilante crusader pledged to rescue damsels from offensive encounters? I just didn't understand what was happening.

"Get in quickly," he said, "or I will shoot you dead."

Help, I mouthed at the Arab, or whatever.

In vain.

I did as Prince Charming suggested. Did anyone notice me being abducted? Or only see a handsome young man hand me enthusiastically into that taxi?

The driver didn't look round.

"Keep quiet," said the young man. "Put these glasses on." He handed me glasses black as night equipped with side-blinkers, such as someone with a rare

hypersensitive eye ailment might wear. Only, these were utterly dark; I couldn't see a thing through them.

We drove for what seemed like half an hour. Eventually we drew up - and waited, perhaps so that passers-by might have time to pass on by - before my abductor assisted me from the cab. Quickly he guided me arm in arm up some steps. A door closed behind us. Traffic noise grew mute.

We mounted a broad flight of stairs, and entered an echoing room - where I was pressured into a straight-backed armchair. Immediately one hand pressed under my nose, and another on my jaw, to force my mouth open.

"Drink!"

Liquid poured down my throat - some sweet concoction masking a bitter undertaste. I gagged and spluttered but had no choice except to swallow.

What had I drunk? What had I drunk?

"I need to see the eyes," said a sombre, if somewhat slobbery voice. "The truth is in the eyes." The accent was Germanic.

A hand removed my glasses.

I found myself in a drawing room with a dusty varnished floor and double oak doors. A small chandelier of dull lustres shone. Thick blue brocade curtains cloaked tall windows, which in any event appeared to be shuttered. A dustsheet covered what I took to be a baby grand piano. An oblong of less faded rose-and-lily wallpaper, over a marble fireplace, showed where some painting had hung.

On a chaise longue sat a slim elegant grizzle-haired man of perhaps sixty kitted out in a well-tailored grey suit. A walking cane was pressed between his knees. His hands opened and closed slowly to reveal the chased silver handle. A second middle-aged man stood near him: stouter, bald, wearing a long purple velvet robe with fur trimmings which at first I thought was some exotic dressing gown. This man's face was jowly and pouchy. He looked like Goering on a bad day. His eyes were eerie: bulgy, yet bright as if he was on cocaine.

My abductor had stationed himself directly behind me.

On a walnut table lay a copy of *Archimboldo Erotico*, open at my introduction.

Shit.

"My apologies," said the seated gent, "for the manner of your coming here, Miss Donaldson." He gestured at the book. "But you owe me a profound apology - and restitution. Your libels must be corrected."

The fellow in the robe moved closer, to stare at me. His fingers wiggled.

"What libels?" I asked, rather deeply scared. These people had to be nutters, possessed by some zany fanatical motive. Well-heeled, well-groomed nutters were maybe the really dangerous sort. What had I drunk? A slow poison? Would I soon be begging for the antidote?

"Libels against a certain Holy Roman Emperor, Miss Donaldson. Thus, libels against the Habsburg dynasty... which may yet be the salvation of Europe, and of the world. Very untimely libels." The gent raised his cane and slashed it to and fro as if decapitating daisies. "I am sure you will see reason to denounce your fabrications publicly..."

"What fabrications?"

He stood up smoothly and brought his cane down savagely upon my book, though his expression remained suave and polite. I jerked, imagining that cane striking me instead.

"These! These obscenities were never painted by Rudolph's court artist!"

"But," I murmured, "the looting of Prague... Skoklosters Castle... Queen Christina's chaplain..."

He sighed. "Lies. All lies. And I do not quite know why. Let us discuss art and history, Miss Donaldson."

"She is deceitful," said the fellow in the robe, always peering at me. "She has a guilty conscience."

"Who are you?" I asked. "The local mind-reader?"

The stout man smiled unctuously.

"Herr Voss is my occultist," explained the gent.

"Oculist? You mean, optician?"

"My occultist! My pansophist. The holder of the keys to the Unknown. And my name happens to be Heinrich von Habsburg, Miss Donaldson..."

"Oh...", I said.

"I shall not burden your brain with genealogy, except to say that I am the living heir to the Holy Roman throne. Let us discuss *art* instead. And history."

This, His Royal Heinrich proceeded to do, while the keeper of the keys contemplated me and my guard hovered behind me.

Rudolph and his father Maximilian before him had been astute, benevolent rulers, who aimed to heal discord in Christian Europe by uniting it under Habsburg rule. They lived noble and honourable lives, as did Count Giuseppe Archimboldo. His supposed fantasias possessed a precise political and metaphysical significance in the context of the Holy Roman throne. The aesthetic harmony of natural elements in the *Vertumnus* and in the other portrait heads bespoke the harmony which would bless Europe under the beneficent leadership of the House of Austria...

Jawohl, I thought.

Ever-present, like the elements themselves, the Habsburgs would rule both microcosm and macrocosm – both the political world, and nature too. Archimboldo's cycle of the seasons, depicted as Habsburg heads wrought of Wintry, Vernal, Summer, and Autumnal ingredients, confided that Habsburg rule would extend eternally through time in one everlasting season. Under the secular and spiritual guidance of those descendants of Hercules, the House of Habsburg, the Golden Age would return to a united Europe.

Right on.

In due course of time, this happy culmination had almost come to pass. The "Great King," as predicted, nay, propagandized by Nostradamus, loomed on the horizon.

When the Habsburgs united with the House of Lorraine, and when Marie Antoinette became Queen of France, the House of Habsburg-Lorraine was within a generation of dominion over Europe – had the French Revolution not intervened.

What a pity.

Throughout the nineteenth century the House attempted to regroup. However, the upheavals attend-

ing the end of the First World War toppled the Habsburgs from power, ushering in chaos...

Shame.

Now all Europe was revived and reuniting, and its citizens were ever more aware that the microcosm of Man and the macrocosm of Nature were a unity.

Yet lacking, as yet, a head.

A Holy Roman Imperial head.

Early restoration of the monarchy in Hungary was one possible ace card, though other cards were also tucked up the imperial sleeve...

Archimboldo's symbolic portraits were holy ikons of this golden dream, especially in view of their eco-injection into the European psyche. Those paintings were programming the people with a subconscious expectation, a hope, a longing, a secret sense of destiny, which a restored Habsburg Holy Roman Empire would fulfil.

"Now do you see why your obscenities are such a libelous blasphemy, Miss Donaldson?"

Good God.

"Do you mean to tell me that you're behind the Archimboldo eco-campaign?" I asked His Imperial Heinrich.

"The power of symbols," remarked Voss, "is very great. Symbols are my speciality."

Apparently they weren't going to tell me whether they simply hoped to exploit an existing, serendipitous media campaign – or whether some loyal Habsburg mole had actively persuaded the ecofreaks to plaster what were effectively Habsburg heads in fruit and veg, and flowers and leaves – all over Europe and America.

"You broke into my flat," I accused the man behind me. "Looking for some dirt that doesn't exist because the erotic paintings are genuine!"

Blondie slapped me sharply across the head.

"Martin! You know that is unnecessary!" H. von H. held up his hand prohibitively – for the moment, at least.

"You broke my door down," I muttered over my shoulder, thinking myself reprieved, "and you stole my CD and TV just to make the thing look plausible. I bet you burgled those other flats in the neighbourhood too as a deception."

Martin, on his own? Surely not... There must have been others involved. The taxi driver... and whoever else...

"Actually, we broke your door *after* the burglary," boasted Martin. "We entered with more circumspection."

Voss smiled in a predatory fashion. "With secret keys, as it were."

Others. Others...

They had blown up the Galerij Bosch! They had burned those two guards to death...

I shrank.

"I see that the magnitude of this is beginning to dawn on your butterfly mind," said the Habsburg. "A united Europe must be saved from pollution. Ecological pollution, of course – a Holy Roman Emperor is as a force of nature. But moral pollution too."

"How about racial?" I queried.

"I'm an aristocrat, not a barbarian," remarked Heinrich. "The Nazis were contemptible. Yet plainly we cannot have Moslems – Turkish heathens – involved

in the affairs of Holy Europe. We cannot have those who besieged our Vienna in 1683 succeeding now by the back door."

Oh, the grievances of centuries long past... Rumby and his science Star Club suddenly seemed like such Johnnies-Come-Lately indeed.

Science... versus imperial magic... with eco-mysticism in the middle...

"I just can't believe you're employing a frigging magician to gain the throne of Europe!"

"Language, Miss Donaldson!" snapped the Habsburg. "You are corrupt."

Voss smoothed his robe as though I had mussed it.

"You're a creature of your time, Miss Donaldson," said H. von H. "Whereas I am a creation of the centuries."

"Would that be *The Centuries of Nostradamus*?" Yes, that was the title of that volume of astrological rigmarole.

"I mustn't forget that you're educated, by the lights of today. Tell me, what do you suppose the *Centuries* of the title refer to?"

"Well, years. A long time, the future."

"Quite wrong. There simply happen to be a hundred quatrains – verses of four lines – in each section. You're only half educated. And thus you blunder. How much did your American art collector pay you for writing that introduction?"

Obviously Rumby would have paid me something... I wouldn't have written those pages for nothing...

"Three thousand dollars," I improvised.

"That doesn't sound very much, considering the evil intent. Is Mr Wright being hoaxed too?"

Again, he slammed the cane on to my book.

An astonishing flash of agony seared across my back. I squealed and twisted round – but Martin was holding no cane.

He was holding nothing at all. With a grin, Martin displayed his empty paws for me. Voss giggled, and when I looked at him he winked.

It was as though that open volume was some voodoo doll of myself which the Habsburg had just chastised.

The Habsburg lashed at my words again, and I cried out, for the sudden pain was intense – yet I knew there would be no mark on me.

Voss licked his lips. "Symbolic resonances, Miss Donaldson. The power of symbolic actions."

What drug had been in that liquid I swallowed? I didn't feel disoriented – save for nerves and dread – yet I must be in some very strange state of mind to account for my suggestibility to pain.

"We can continue thus for a while, Miss Donaldson." Heinrich raised his cane again.

"Wait."

Was three quarters of a million dollars enough to compensate for being given the third degree right now by crazy, ruthless murderers – who could torture me symbolically, but effectively?

I experienced an absurd vision of myself attempting to tell the West Indian detective-constable that actually my flat had been broken into by agents of a Holy Roman Emperor who hoped to take over Europe – and that I was seeking police protection because the Habsburgs could hurt me agonizingly by whipping my words...

Was I mad, or was I mad?

The room seemed luminous, glowing with an inner light. Every detail of furniture or drapery was intensely actual. I thought that my sense of reality had never been stronger.

"Okay," I admitted, "the paintings were all forgeries. They were done in Holland, but I honestly don't know who by. I never met him. I never learned his name. Rumby – Mr Wright – hates the ecology lobby because they hate space exploration, and he thinks that's our only hope. I have a friend at the *Sunday Times*. I'll tell him everything – about how the paintings were a prank. They'll love to print that! Wright will have egg on his face."

"What a treacherous modern creature you are," the Habsburg said with casual contempt; and I squirmed with shame and fear.

"Just watch for next weekend's paper," I promised.

"At this moment," said Voss, "she believes she is going to do what she says – and of course she knows that our Martin can find her, if she breaks her word..." He peered.

"Ah: she's relieved that you cannot reach her from a distance with the whipping cane.

"And she wonders whether Martin would really kill her, and thus lose us her testimony..."

No, he wasn't reading my mind. He wasn't! He was reading my face, my muscles. He could do so because everything was so real.

More peering.

"She feels a paradoxical affection for her friend... Rumby. Solidarity, as well as greed. Yes, a definite loyalty." If only I hadn't called him Rumby. If only I'd just called him Wright. It was all in the words. Voss wasn't reading my actual thoughts.

"So therefore," H. von H. said to Voss, "she must be retrained in her loyalties."

What did he mean? What did he mean?

"She must be conditioned by potent symbols, Voss."

"Just so, Excellency."

"Thus she will not wish to betray us. Enlighten her, Voss. Show her the real depth of history, from where we come. Your juice will be deep in her now."

Numbness crept over me, as Voss loomed closer. The sheer pressure of his approach was paralyzing me.

"Wait," I managed to squeak.

"Wait?" echoed H. von H. "Oh, I have waited long enough already. My family has waited long enough. Through the French Revolution, through the Communist intermezzo... The Holy Roman Empire will revive at this present cusp of history – for it has always remained in being, at least as a state of mind. And mind is what matters, Miss Donaldson – as Rudolph knew, contrary to your pornographic lies! Ah yes, my ancestor avidly sought the symbolic key to the ideal world. Practitioners of the symbolic, hermetic arts visited him in Prague Castle – though he lacked the loyal services of a Voss..."

The Habsburg slid his cane under the dustsheet of the piano, and whisked the cloth off. Seating himself on the stool, he threw open the lid of the baby grand with a crash. His slim, manicured fingers started to play plangent, mournful Debussyish chords in which I could almost feel myself begin to drown.

Voss crooned to me – or sang – in some dialect of

German...and I couldn't move a muscle. Surely I was shrinking – or else the drawing room was expanding. Or both. Voss was becoming vast.

I was a little child again – yet not a child, but rather a miniature of myself. When I was on the brink of puberty, lying in bed just prior to drifting off to sleep, this same distortion of the senses used to happen to me.

The music lamented.

And Voss crooned my lullaby.

A bearded man in black velvet and cerise satin held my nude paralyzed body in his hands. He held the whole of me in his hands – for I was tiny now, the height of his forearm.

Draped over his shoulders was a lavish ermine cloak.

I was stiff, unmoving.

He placed me in a niche, ran his fingertip down my belly, and traced the cleft between my thighs.

He stepped back.

Then he left.

I was in a great gloomy vaulted chamber housing massive cupboards and strongboxes. The slit windows in the thick stone wall were grated so as to deter any slim catburglars. Stacked several deep around a broad shelf, and likewise below, were mythological and Biblical oil paintings: Tintoretto's, Titians, by the look of them...Neither the lighting nor the decor were at all in the spirit of any latterday museum. Here was art as treasure – well and truly locked up.

Days and nights passed.

Weeks of static solitude until I was going crazy. I would have welcomed any change whatever, any newcomer. My thoughts looped around a circuit of Strada, death in Amsterdam, Habsburgs, with the latter assuming ever more significance – and necessity – with each mental swing.

Eventually the door opened, and in walked a figure who made the room shine. For his face and hair were made of a hundred springtime flowers, his collar of white daisies, and his clothes of a hundred lush leaves.

He stood and gazed at me through floral eyes, and with his rosebud lips he smiled faintly.

He simply went away.

A season passed, appalling in its sheer duration. I saw daisies like stars before my eyes, in an unending afterimage.

Then in walked glowing Summer. His eyes were ripe cherries. His teeth were little peas. Plums and berries tangled in his harvest-hair; and his garment was of woven straw.

And he too smiled, and went away in turn.

And another season passed...

...till rubicund Autumn made his appearance. He was a more elderly fellow with an oaten beard, a fat pear of a nose, mushroom ears, clusters of grapes instead of locks of hair. His chin was a pomegranate. He wore an overripe burst fig as an ear-ring. He winked lecherously, and departed even as I tried to cry out to him through rigid lips, to stay.

For next came Winter, old and gnarled, scabbed and scarred, his nose a stump of rotted branch, his skin of fissured bark, his lips of jutting bracket-fungus.

Winter stayed for a longer grumbly time, though he

no more reached to touch me than had his predecessors. His departure – the apparent end of this cycle of seasons – plunged me into despair. I was as cold as marble.

Until one day the door opened yet again, and golden light bathed my prison chamber.

Vertumnus himself advanced – the fruitful God, his cheeks of ripe apple and peach, head crowned with fruit and grain, his chest a mighty pumpkin. His cherry and blackberry eyes glinted.

Rudolph!

He reached for me. Oh to be embraced by him! To be warmed.

He lifted my paralyzed naked body from its dusty niche.

The crash which propelled me back into the drawing room might almost have been caused by his dropping me and letting me shatter.

For a moment I thought that this was indeed so.

Yet it was my trance which had been shattered.

A policeman was in the room. An armed policeman, crouching. He panned his gun around. Plainly I was the only other person present.

The crash must have been that of those double oak doors flying open as he burst in.

Footsteps thumped, elsewhere in the house.

Voices called.

"Empty!"

"Empty!"

Several other officers spilled into the room.

"You all right, Miss?"

I could move my limbs – which were clothed exactly as earlier on, in jeans and maroon paisley sweater. I wasn't tiny and naked, after all. I stared around. No sign of von Habsburg or Voss or Martin.

"You all right, Miss? Do you understand me?"

I nodded slowly. I still felt feeble.

"She was just sitting here all on her own," commented the officer, putting his pistol away. "So what's happening?" he demanded of me.

How did they know I was here?

"I was...forced into a taxi," I said. "I was brought here, then given some drug."

"What sort of drug? Why?"

"It made me...dream."

"Who brought you here?"

"A man called Martin..."

He's the Habsburg Emperor's hit-man... The drug was concocted by a magician...

How could I tell them such things? How could I explain about Rudolph Vertumnus...? (And how could I deny Vertumnus, who had almost rekindled me...?)

"They were trying to get me to deny things I wrote about the painter Archimboldo..."

"About a painter?"

I tried to explain about the pictures, the bombing in Amsterdam, and how my flat had been burgled. My explanation slid away of its own accord – for the sake of sheer plausibility, and out of logical necessity! – from any Habsburg connexion, and into the ecofreak channel.

The officer frowned. "You're suggesting that the Greens who bombed that gallery also kidnapped you? There's no one here now."

"They must have seen you coming and run away. I'm quite confused."

"Hmm," said the officer. "Come in, Sir," he called.

In walked Phil: chunky, dapper Phil, velvet jacketed and suede-shoed, his rich glossy brown hair brushed back in elegant waves, as ever.

It was Phil who had seen me pushed into the taxi; he who had noticed the gleam of gun from right across the street where he had been loitering with intent outside a bookshop, waiting for me to emerge from St Martin's so that he could bump into me. He'd managed to grab another taxi and follow. He'd seen me hustled into that house in North London, wearing those black "goggles." It took about an hour for him to stir up the armed posse – an hour, during which four seasons had passed before my eyes.

The fact that Phil and I were long-term "friends" and that he turned out to be a "journalist" – of sorts – irked the police. The abduction – by persons unknown, to a vacant house, where I simply sat waiting patiently – began to seem distinctly stage-managed... for the sake of publicity. Nor – given the Amsterdam connection – did my mention of drugs help matters. Calling out armed police was a serious matter.

We were both obliged to answer questions until late in the evening before we could leave the police station; and even then it seemed as if we ourselves might still be charged with some offence. However, those deaths in Amsterdam lent a greater credence to what I said. Maybe there was something serious behind this incident...

I, of course, was "confused." Thus, early on, I was given a blood test, about which the police made no further comment; there couldn't have been any evidence of hash or acid in my system.

I needed to stay "confused" until I could get to talk to Rumby.

Peeved Phil, of course, insisted on talking to me over late dinner in a pizzeria – we were both starving by then.

I lied quite a lot; and refrained from any mention of Habsburgs or the Star Club. The Archimboldo paintings had all been genuine. Rumby was an up-front person. Euro Ecofreaks must have bombed the gallery. Must have abducted me. Blondie Martin; elderly man, name unknown; stout man, name of Voss, who wore a strange costume. German speakers. Just the same as I'd told the police, five or six times over. The kidnappers had tried to persuade me to denounce what I had written because my words were an insult to Archimboldo, emblem of the Greens. They had drugged me into a stupor – from which I recovered with surprising swiftness. Rescue had come too soon for much else to transpire...

Phil and I were sharing a tuna, anchovy, and prawn ensemble on a crispy base, and drinking red wine.

"It's quite some story, Jill. Almost front-page stuff."

"I doubt it."

"The Eco connection! Bombing, abduction... I'd like to run this by Freddy on the news desk."

"You're an art critic, Phil – and so am I. I don't want some cockeyed blather in the papers."

"Jill," he reproached me, "I've just spent *all* evening in a police station on account of you."

"I'm grateful you did what you did, Phil. Let's stop it there."

"For Christ's sake, you could still be in danger! Or... aren't you, after all? Was this a publicity stunt? Was it staged by Wright? You're in deep, but you want out now? Why would he stage such a stunt? If he did... what really happened in Amsterdam?"

Dear God, how his antennae were twitching. "No, no, no. It couldn't be a stunt because the only witness to it was you, and that was quite by chance!"

"By chance," he mused... as though maybe I might have spied him from an upper window in St Martin's and promptly phoned for a kidnapper.

"Look, Phil, I'm confused. I'm tired. I need sleep."

Into the pizzeria stepped a stout, bald man wearing a dark blue suit. He flourished a silver-tipped walking stick. Goering on a night out. His bulgy eyes fixed on mine. He swished the stick, and I screamed with pain, jerking against the table, spilling both our wines.

"Jill!"

Phil managed to divert the red tide with his paper napkin at the same time as he reached out towards me. Other customers stared agog, and the manager hastened in our direction. Were we engaged in some vicious quarrel? Wine dripped on to the floor tiles.

Voss had vanished. I slumped back.

"Sorry," I said to the manager. "I had a bad cramp."

The manager waved a waiter to minister to the mess. Other diners resumed munching their pizzas.

"Whatever happened?" whispered Phil.

"A cramp. Just a cramp."

Could one of those Habsburgs have trailed us to the police station and hung around outside for hours, keeping watch till we emerged?

Had I truly seen Voss, or only someone who resembled him? Someone whose appearance and whose action triggered that pain reflex? That agonizing hallucination...

Phil took me back to the flat in a taxi. I had no choice but to let him come up with me – in case the place was infested.

It wasn't. Then it took half an hour to get rid of my friend, no matter how much tiredness I claimed. By the time I phoned Rumby's private number it was after eleven.

Him, I did start to tell about the Habsburgs.

He was brevity itself. "Say no more," my rich protector cut in. My Rumby Daddy. "Stay there. I'm sending Case now. He'll phone from the car just as soon as he's outside your place. Make quite sure you see it's him before you open your door."

I dozed off soundly in the Merc. When I arrived at Bexford, Rumby had waited up to quiz me and pump me – attended by Case, and a somewhat weary Lascelles.

I got to bed around four...

...leaving Rumby aiming to do some serious phoning. Had Big Daddy been breaking out the benzedrine? Not exactly. Rumby always enjoyed a few hours advantage over us local mortals. So as to stay more in synch with American time-zones he habitually rose very late of a morning. A night shift duo always manned the computer consoles and transatlantic satellite link. In that sense, Bexford never really closed down.

I'd already gathered that crisis was somewhat of a staff of life around Rumby – who seemed to cook up his own personal supply of benzedrine internally. During my previous two-day sojourn, there'd been the incident of the microlite aircraft. Thanks to a Cotswold Air Carnival, microlites were overflying Bexford at a few hundred feet now and then. Rumby took exception and had Lascelles trying to take out a legal injunction against the organizers.

Simultaneously, there'd been the business of the starlings. Affronted by those microlite pterodactyls, and seeking a new air-base for their sorties, a horde of the quarrelsome birds took up residence on the satellite dish. Their weight or their shit might distort bits of information worth millions. What to do? After taking counsel from an avian welfare organization, Rumby despatched his helicopter to collect a heap of French pétard firecrackers from Heathrow to string underneath the gutters. So my stay had been punctuated by random explosive farts...

I woke at noon, and Rumby joined me for breakfast in the big old kitchen – antiquity retrofitted with stainless steel and ceramic hobs. A large TV set was tuned to CNN, and an ecologist was inveighing about rocket exhausts and the ozone holes.

"Each single shuttle launch releases a hundred and sixty-three thousand kilograms of hydrogen chloride that converts into an atmospheric mist of hydrochloric acid! So now they're kindly promising to change the oxidizer of the fuel – the ammonium perchlorate that produces this vast cloud of pollution – to ammonium nitrate instead –"

As soon as I finished my croissant, Rumby scuttled the cooks – a couple of local women – out to pick herbs and vegetables. He blinked at me a few times.

"Any more sightings of flowerpot men? Or Habsburgs?" he enquired.

"That isn't funny, Rumby. It happened."

He nodded. "I'm afraid you've been given a ring-binder, Jill."

"Come again?"

"I've been talking to one of my best chemists over in Texas. Sally has a busy mind. Knows a lot about pharmaceuticals." He consulted scribbles in a notebook. "The ring in question's a molecular structure called an indole ring...These rings bind to synapses in the brain. Hence, ring-binder. They're psychotomimetic – they mimic psychoses. Your little pets will probably stay in place a long time instead of breaking down. Seems there's a lot of covert designer drug work going on right now, aimed at cooking up chemicals to manipulate people's beliefs. Sally has heard rumours of one drug code-named Confusion – and another one called Persuasion, which seems to fit the bill here. It's the only explanation for the hallucination – which came from within you, of course, once you were given the appropriate prod."

"I do realize I was hallucinating the...flowerpot men. You mean this can continue...indefinitely?"

"You flashed on for a full encore in that pizza parlour, right? Whiplash! Any fraught scenes in future involving old Archy could do the same. Media interviews, that sort of thing – if you disobey the Habsburg view of Archy. Though I guess you mustn't spill the



beans about them publicly."

"They told me so. How did I get away with telling you last night?"

"They were interrupted before they'd finished influencing you." He grinned. "I guess I might be high enough in the hierarchy of your loyalties to outrank their partial hold on you. Media or Press people wouldn't be, so you'd be advised to follow the Habsburg party line with them. Maybe you could resist at a cost."

"Of what?"

"Pain, inflicted by your own mind. Distortions of reality. That's what Sally says. That's the word on these new ring-binders. They bind you."

The more I thought about this, the less I liked it.

"How many people know about these persuader drugs?" I asked him carefully.

"They haven't exactly featured in *Newsweek*. I gather they're a bit experimental. Sally has an ear for rumours. She's part of my research division. Runs a search-team scanning the chemistry journals. What-ever catches the eye. Any tips of future icebergs. New petrochemical applications, mainly." He spoke as if icebergs started out fully submerged, then gradually revealed themselves. "She helped dig up data on the correct paint chemistry for the Archies."

How frank he was being.

Apparently. And how glib.

"So how would a Habsburg magician get his paws on prototype persuader drugs?" I demanded.

Rumby looked rueful. "Hell, maybe he is a magician! Alchemy precedes chemistry, don't they say?"

"In the same sense that Icarus precedes a jumbo jet?"

One of the cooks returned bearing an obese marrow.

Impulse took me to the kitchen garden, to brood on my own. The sun had finally burned through persistent haze to brighten the rows of cabbages, majestic cauliflowers, and artichokes, the rhubarb, the leeks. An ancient brick wall backed this domain, trusses of tomatoes ranged along it. Rooks cawed in the elms beyond, prancing about those raggedy stick-nests that seemed like diseases of the branches.

Had the old gent whom I'd met really been Heinrich von Habsburg? A Holy Roman Emperor waiting in the wings to step on the world stage? Merely because he told me so, in persuasive circumstances?

What if that trio in the drawing room had really been *ecofreaks* masquerading as Habsburgs, pulling the wool over my eyes, trying to bamboozle me into confession?

Did puritanical *ecofreaks* have the wit to stage such a show?

How much more likely that the Star Club, with its presumed access to cutting-edge psychochemistry and a penchant for dirty tricks? – was responsible for the charade, and for my drugging!

Whether Rumby himself knew so, or not.

Wipe me out as a reliable witness to my own part in the prank? Eliminate me, by giving me an ongoing nervous breakdown?

Would that invalidate what I'd written?

Ah no. The slur would be upon ecologists...

And maybe, at the same time, test that persuader drug? Give it a field-trial on a highly suitable test

subject, namely myself? The Club's subsequent aim might be try similar persuasion on influential *ecofreaks* to alter their opinions or to make them seem crazy...

In my case, of course, they wouldn't wish to turn me into an *eco-groupie*... Thus the Habsburg connection could have seemed like a fertile ploy.

Was there a genuine, elderly Heinrich von Habsburg somewhere in Germany or Austria? Oh, doubtless there would be...

The vegetable garden began slithering, pulsing, throbbing. Ripe striped marrows thumped upon the ground, great green gonads. Tomatoes tumesced. Leeks were waxy white candles with green flames writhing high. Celery burst from earth, spraying feathery leaves. Sprouts jangled. Cauliflowers were naked brains.

The garden was trying to transform itself, to assemble itself into some giant sprawled potent body – of cauli brain, leek fingers, marrow organs, green leaf flesh...

I squealed and fled back towards the kitchen itself.

Then halted, like a hunted animal.

I couldn't go inside – where Rumby and Case and Lascelles plotted... the downfall of Nature, the rape of the planets, the bleeding of oil from Earth's veins to burn into choking smoke.

Behind me, the vegetable jungle had stilled. Its metamorphosis had halted, reversed.

If I thought harmoniously, not perversely, I was safe.

Yet my mind was churning, and reality was unstuck.

In my perception one conspiracy overlayed another. One scheming plot, another scheming plot. Therefore one reality overlayed another reality with hideous persuasiveness. Where had I just been, but in a vegetable plot?

I couldn't go into that house, to which I had fled for safety only the night before. For from inside Bexford Hall invisible tendrils arched out across the sky, bouncing up and down out of space, linking Rumby to star crusaders who were playing with my mind – and to whom he might be reporting my condition even now, guilefully or innocently.

On the screen of the sky I spied a future world of Confusion and Persuasion, where devoted fanatics manipulated moods chemically so that Nature became a multifold creature evoking horror – since it might absorb one into itself, mind-meltingly, one's keen consciousness dimming into pulsing, orgasmic dreams; and from which one could only flee in silver ships, out to the empty serenity of space where no universally linked weeds infested the floating rocks, no bulging tomato haemorrhoids the asteroids...

Or else conjuring up a positive lust for vital vegetative unity!

I slapped myself, trying to summon a Habsburger whiplash of pain to jerk me out of this bizarre dual vision.

I must go indoors. To sanity. And beyond.

The ring-binder was clamping more and more of me; and my mind was at war. I was scripting my own hallucinations from the impetus of *ecofreak* ideology, exaggerated absurdly, and from the myth of the Holy Roman Empire... I was dreaming. wide awake.

And Case stood, watching me.

"You okay, Jill?"

I nodded. I shouldn't tell him the truth. There was no truth any more; there was only potent imagery, subject to interpretation.

Certain bedrock facts existed: the bombing, the deaths in Amsterdam, my abduction... Event-images: that's what those were. The interpretation was another matter, dependent upon what one believed – just as art was forever being reinterpreted in the context of a new epoch; and even history too.

Persuasion and Confusion too? – had torn me loose from my moorings, so that interpretations cascaded about me simultaneously, synchronously. I had become a battlefield between world-views, which different parts of my mind were animating.

With dread, I sensed something stirring which perhaps had lain dormant ever since humanity split from Nature – ever since true consciousness of self had dawned as a sport, a freak, a biological accident...

"You sure, Jill?"

You. I. Myself. Me.

The independent thinking entity, named Jill Donaldson.

I wasn't thinking quite so independently any longer. An illusion of Self – that productive illusion upon which civilization itself had been founded – was floundering.

"Quite sure," said I.

I, I, I. Ich. Io. Ego.

And Jill Donaldson hastened past him into the kitchen, where one of the cooks was hollowing out the marrow. The big TV set, tuned to CNN, scooping signals bounced from space, shimmered. The colours bled and reformed. The pixel pixies danced a new jig.

The countenance of Vertumnus gazed forth from that screen, he of the laughing lips, the ripe rubicund cheeks of peach and apple, the pear-nose, the golden ears of corn that were his brows. Oh the flashing hilarity of his berry-eyes. Oh those laughing lips.

With several nods of his head he gestured Jill elsewhere.

Jill adopted a pan-face.

She walked through the corridors of the house, to the front porch. She stepped out on to the gravel drive.

Ignition keys were in the red Porsche.

Jill ought to be safe with Annie in a colony of women. Rudolph Vertumnus was a male, wasn't he?

A hop through Cheltenham, then whoosh by motorway to Exeter and on down into Cornwall. She would burn fuel but keep an eye out for police patrols. Be at Polmerrin by dusk...

The Porsche wasn't even approaching Cheltenham when the car phone burred, inevitably. She had been counting on a call.

A stolen bright red Porsche would be a little obvious on the motorway. So she had her excuse lined up. She was going to visit her brother – in Oxford, in roughly the opposite direction. She'd be back at Bexford that evening. Brother Bob was a banker. Let Rumby worry that she was going to blab to him to protect her 750K investment, about which she no longer cared a hoot. Let Case and some co-driver hare after her fruitlessly towards Oxford in the Merc.

The voice wasn't Case's. Or Lascelles'. Or even Rumby's.

She nearly jerked the Porsche off the road.

The voice was that of Voss.

"Can you hear me, Fraulein Donaldson?"

Hands shaking, legs trembling, she guided the car into a gateway opening on to a huge field of close-cut golden stubble girt by a hawthorn hedge. A Volvo hooted in protest as it swung by. A rabbit fled.

"How did you find me, Voss – ?" she gasped. Horrid perspectives loomed. "They told you! They know you!"

The caller chuckled.

"I'm merely the voice of Vertumnus, Fraulein. My image is everywhere these days, so why shouldn't I be everywhere too? Are you perhaps worried about the collapse of your precious Ego, Fraulein?"

How persuasive his voice was. "This has all happened before, you know. The God of the Bible ruled the medieval world, but when He went into eclipse Humanity seized His sceptre. Ah, that exalted Renaissance Ego! How puffed up it was! By the time of Rudolph, that same Ego was already collapsing. Its confidence had failed. A new unity was needed – a bio-cosmic social unity. The Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph sought to be the head of society – hence the painting of so many regal heads by the artist you have labelled. Those biological, botanical heads."

"I already know this," she said.

"He would be the head – and the people, the limbs, the organs. Of one body! In the new world now a-dawning life will be a unity again. The Emperor will be the head – but not a separate, egotistic head. Nor will the limbs and organs be separate individualists."

"You're telling me what I know!" Aye, and what she most feared – namely the loss of Self. Its extinction. And what she most feared might well win; for what is feared is potent.

"Who are you? What are you?" she cried into the phone – already suspecting that Voss's voice, the voice of Vertumnus, might well be in her own wayward head, either ring-bound or else planted there by alchemical potion.

She slammed the hand-set down on to its cradle by the gearshift lever, thumbed the windows fully open, and lit a cigarette to calm herself. Whispers of smoke drifted out towards the shorn field.

A mat of golden stubble cloaked the broad shoulders of the land. A ghostly pattern emerged across the great network of dry stalks: a coat of arms. The hedge was merely green braiding. Her car was a shiny red bug parked on the shoulder of a giant sprawling being.

Angrily she pitched her cigarette through the passenger window towards the field, wishing that it might start a fire, though really the straw was far too short to combust.

She drove on; and when the phone seemed to burble again, she ignored it.

She smoked. She threw out half-burned cigarettes till the pack was empty, but no smoke ever plumed upwards far behind her.

Half way through Cheltenham, in slow-moving traffic, she passed a great billboard flaunting Rudolph Vertumnus. WE ARE ALL PART OF NATURE, proclaimed the all too familiar text.

Evidently unseen by other drivers and pedestrians, the fruity Emperor shouldered his way out of the poster. A pumpkin-belly that she had never seen before reared into view. And marrow-legs, from between which aubergine testicles and a carrot cock dangled. Vertumnus towered over the other cars and vans behind her, bestriding the roadway. His carrot swelled enormously.

Raphanidosis: ancient Greek word. To be fucked by a giant radish. To be radished, ravished.

Vertumnus was coming.

A red light changed to green, and she was able to slip onward before the giant could advance to unpeel the roof of the Porsche and lift her out, homunculus-like, from her container.

Even in the heart of the city, a chthonic entity was coming to life. A liberated, incarnated deity was being born.

No one else but Jill saw it as yet.

Yet everyone knew it from ten thousand posters and badges – wearing its varied seasonal faces. Everyone knew Vertumnus by now, deity of change and transformation; for change was in the air, as ripe Autumn matured. The death of Self was on the horizon.

When she reached the motorway, those triple lanes cutting far ahead through the landscape opened up yawning perspectives of time rather than of space.

Deep time, in which there'd been no conscious mind present at all, only vegetable and animal existence. Hence, the blankness of the road...

Soon, a new psychic era might dawn in which the sovereign virtue of the conscious Self faded as humanity re-entered Nature once again – willing the demise of dissective, alienating logics and sciences, altering the mind-set, hypnotizing itself into a communal empathy with the world, whose potent figurehead wasn't any vague, cloudy Gaea, but rather her son Vertumnus. Every eating of his body – of fruits and nuts and vegetables and fishes – would be a vividly persuasive communion. His royal representative would reign in Budapest, or in Prague, or Vienna. His figurehead.

The phone burbled, and this time Jill did answer as she swung along the endless tongue of tarmac, and through time.

"Jill, don't hang up." Rumby. "I know why you've skipped out. And you must believe it ain't my fault."

What was he talking about?

"I've been the well-meaning patsy in this business. I've been the Gorby."

"Who was he?" she asked mischievously. Here was a message from a different era.

"I'm fairly sure by now that my goddam Star Club was behind the bombing and the ring-binder. Didn't trust me to be thorough enough. The whole Archy situation was really a lot more serious than even I saw. Those damn posters were really imprinting people on some deep-down level – not just surface propaganda. These are power-images. Fucking servo-symbols –"

"You're only fairly sure?" she asked.

"What tipped you off? Was it something Case said? Or Johnny Lascelles? Something Johnny let slip? I mean, why did you skip?"

Something Case or Lascelles had let slip...? So

Rumby was becoming a tad paranoid about his own staff in case they were serving two masters – Rumby himself, and some other rich gent in that secret Star Club of theirs... A gent whom she had perhaps met in that drawing room in North London; who had caned her at a distance...

"Come back, Jill, and tell me all you know, I'm serious! I need to know."

Oh yes, she could recognize the authentic tones of paranoia...

"Sorry about taking the Porsche," she said.

"Never mind the fucking car. Where are you, Jill?"

She remembered.

"I'm going to Oxford to see my brother. He's a bank manager."

She hung up, and ignored repeated calls.

Polmerrin lay in a wooded little valley within a couple of miles of the rocky, wind-whipped North Cornwall coastline. Sheltered by the steep plunge of land and by oakwood, the once-derelect hamlet of cottages now housed studios and craft workshops, accompanied by a dozen satellite caravans. Pottery, jewellery, painting, sculpting, candle-making...

Kids played. Women worked. A few male companions lent an enlightened hand. Someone was tootling a flute, and a buzzard circled high overhead. A kingfisher flashed to and fro along a stream, one soggy bank of which was edged by alder buckthorn. Some brimstone butterflies still fluttered, reluctant to succumb to worn-out wings and cooling nights. The sunset was brimstone too: sulphur and orange peel. A few arty tourists were departing.

Immediately Jill realized that she had come to the wrong place entirely. She ought to have fled to some high-tech airport hotel with gleaming glass elevators – an inorganic, air-conditioned, sealed machine resembling a space station in the void.

She was too tired to reverse her route.

Red-haired Annie embraced Jill, in surprise and joy. She kissed Jill, hugged her.

Freckled Annie was wearing one of those Indian cotton dresses – in green hues – with tiny mirrors sewn into it; and she'd put some extra flesh upon her once-lithe frame, though not to the extent of positive plumpness. She had also put on slim, scrutinizing glasses. Pewter rings adorned several fingers, with scarab and spider motifs.

One former barn was now a refectory, to which she led a dazed Jill to drink lemonade.

"How long has it been, Jilly? Four years? You'll stay with me, of course. So what's happening?" She frowned. "I did hear about your book – and that awful bombing. I still listen to the radio all day long while I'm painting –"

"Jill's drugged," said Jill. "Vertumnus is reborn. And the Holy Roman Empire is returning."

Annie scrutinized her with concern. "Holy shit." She considered. "You'd better not tell any of the others. There are kids here. Folks might worry."

They whispered, as once they had whispered confidences.

"Do you know the *Portrait of Jacopo Strada*?" Jill began. She found she could still speak about herself in the first person, historically.

Presently there were indeed kids and mothers and a medley of other women, and a few men in the refectory too, sharing an early supper of spiced beans and rice and salad and textured vegetable protein, Madras style, while Vivaldi played from a tape-deck. The beams of the barn were painted black, and murals of fabulous creatures relieved the whiteness of the plaster: a phoenix, a unicorn, a minotaur, each within a maze-like Celtic surround, so that it seemed as if so many heraldic shields were poised around the walls. Tourists would enjoy cream teas in here of an afternoon.

Sulphur and copper had cleared from a sky that was now deeply leaden-blue, fast darkening. Venus and Jupiter both shone. A shooting star streaked across the vault of void; or was that a failed satellite burning up?

Annie shared a studio with Rosy and Meg, who would be playing chess that evening in the recreation barn beside the refectory. The whole ground floor of the reconditioned cottage was studio. Meg's work was meticulous neo-medieval miniatures featuring eerie freaks rather than anyone comely. Rosy specialized in acrylic studies of transparent hourglass buildings set within forests, or in crystalline deserts, and crowded with disembodied heads instead of sand.

Annie used to paint swirling, luminous abstracts. Now she specialized in large acrylic canvasses of bloom within bloom within bloom, vortexes that sucked the gaze down into a central focus from which an eye always gazed out: a cat's, a bird's, a person's. Her pictures were like strange, exploded, organic cameras.

Jill looked; Jill admired. The paintings looked at her. Obviously there was a thematic empathy between the three women who used this studio.

"The conscious mind is going into eclipse," Jill remarked, and Annie smiled hesitantly.

"That's a great title. I might use it."

A polished wooden stairway led up to a landing with three bedrooms.

Annie's wide bed was of brass, with a floral duvet. Marguerites, daisies, buttercups.

In the morning when Jill awoke, the flowers had migrated from the duvet.

Annie's face, her neck, her shoulders were petals and stalks. Her skin was of white and pink blossoms. Her ear was a tulip, her nose was the bud of a lily, and her hair a fountain of red nasturtiums.

Jill reached to peel off some of the petals, but the flowers were flesh, and Annie awoke with a squeak of protest. Her open eyes were black nightshades with white blossom pupils.

And Jilldonaldson, whose name was dissolving, was the first to see such a transformation as would soon possess many men and women who regarded one another in a suitable light as part of Nature.

Jilldona stepped from the brass bed, towards the window, and pulled the curtains aside.

The valley was thick with mist. Yet a red light strobed the blur of vision. Spinning, this flashed from the roof of a police car parked beside the Porsche. Shapeless wraiths danced in its dipped headlight beams. One officer was scanning the vague, evasive cottages. A second walked around the Porsche, peered into it, then opened the passenger door.

"Hey," said Annie, "why did you tweak me?"

Annie's flesh was much as the night before, except that Jill continued to see a faint veil of flowers, an imprint of petals.

"Jill just wanted a cigarette," said Jill.

"I quit a couple of years ago," Annie reminded her. "Tobacco costs too much. Anyway, you didn't smoke last night."

"Jill forgot to. Fuzz are down there. Fuzz make Jill want a fag."

"That braggartly car – we ought to have driven it miles away! Miles and miles." Yet Annie didn't sound totally convinced that sheltering this visitor might be the best idea.

Jilldona pulled on her paisley sweater and jeans, and descended. Annie's paintings eyed her brightly as she passed by, recording her within their petal-ringed pupils.

She walked over to the police, one of whom asked:

"You wouldn't be a Miss Jill Donaldson, by any chance?" The burr of his Cornish accent...

"Names melt," she told her questioner. "The mind submerges in a unity of being. Have the Habsburgs sent you?" she asked. "Or was it the Star Club?"

One officer removed the ignition key from the Porsche and locked the car.

The other steered her by the arm into the back of the strobing vehicle. She could see no flowers on these policemen. However, a pair of wax strawberries dangled discretely from the driving mirror like blood-bright testicles.

For Hannah Shapero

Ian Watson last appeared in *Interzone* with "The Eye of the Ayatollah" (issue 33). His recent books include the novel *The Flies of Memory* and the short-story collection *Stalin's Teardrops* (both Gollancz). He also wrote the well received "Warhammer 40,000" space opera *Inquisitor* for GW Books (and another such novel, *Space Marine*, remains in limbo following that publisher's suspension of activities). Lately, much of Ian's time has been taken up by a mysterious project on behalf of a leading film-maker: he's keeping mum for the time being, but has promised us an interview when he's free to talk about it.

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Divinely Inspired

Andrew Tidmarsh talks to Lawrence Sutin, Biographer of Philip K. Dick

Lawrence Sutin's first book was *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick*; his second book is *In Pursuit of Valis: Selections from the Exegesis*; his third book will be an as yet untitled biography of Aleister Crowley. Sutin explains: "I make all my writing decisions unconsciously and then, once I make them, I see all sorts of parallels. Here are the parallels between Philip K. Dick and Aleister Crowley. First of all, they both came from despised genres: Science Fiction and the Occult. If I say, well, here's a writer on the occult, most people hold up their noses just as they do if you say here is a science-fiction writer. The other thing is, both of them were incredibly brilliant and complex persons who tried to encompass reality. They were satisfied with no less than an understanding of what the universe was really all about. And they were not afraid to ask grand questions. That very much endears someone to me.

"I fell in love with Dick's work in the mid-1970s. I was not what you would call a science-fiction fan in the sense that I read omnivorously and could name all of the great writers in the field. I read selectively: liked some and didn't like others. Then there was this, in retrospect, rather well-known interview with Philip K. Dick conducted by Paul Williams and published in *Rolling Stone* ("The Worlds of Philip K. Dick": 6 November 1975). I didn't read that interview but a friend did and read *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* and simply insisted that I read it. I did; and I loved it. It is not only brilliantly plotted; the characters race from crisis to crisis with as little idea of what they're doing as you or I or the rest of us. I'd read bushels of Existential novels that complained that life was absurd and that the categories of reality were arbitrary. In *Three Stigmata*, Philip K. Dick's narrative managed – and I think not only for me but for a number of readers – to create a visceral impact: you felt, literally, that your views of reality, the categories into which you placed things, were shimmering and less absolute than they ever had been."

That calling into question of the categories of being was something Philip K. Dick did for Sutin more strikingly than any other writer. Sutin mentions Kafka, Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811, a German dramatist; in his tragedies – according to *The Penguin Companion to Literature* – "under the influence of passion man's feelings become confused and he inevitably misinterprets the truth of any given situation... Even in the comedies, the confusion of appearance and reality is never far from the surface"), Gogol, Dostoevsky. Other writers were comparable but Philip K. Dick had the strongest effect.

"It is a commonplace to say about us that we have reality filters, we let in certain sensations, certain thoughts: they are appropriate, useful. Others that we regard as inessential or somehow questionable we filter out and ignore. For Philip K. Dick the filters were down: reality seemed to be streaming in on all sides. He managed to create that impression in me, as a reader. And I would say that, as a result of reading his books, I am more alert, more open, and take more seriously the nature of the perceptions that I – and other people around me – have: I don't, simply, conclude that this can't be so, that this shouldn't be thought. I wouldn't want to draw too many comparisons but, in this respect, and in this respect only, there is a close relationship between what I comprehend in Philip K. Dick's writings and what I comprehend in Sufi writings: in particular, in the writings of Idries Shah: he's a great favourite of mine."

But of course – lest we forget – Philip K. Dick was primarily a writer of science fiction, not a philosopher. During his lifetime he published more than 30 sf novels, from *Solar Lottery* in 1955 to *The Divine Invasion* in 1981. His *Collected Short Stories* (available from Underwood-Miller in the USA and from Grafton in the UK) contain more than 900,000 words of science fiction. Sutin provides a useful Chronological Survey in which he offers a guide to Philip K. Dick's novels in the order in which they were written (rather than published) and attempts to rate them

all on a scale from one to ten. (For the record, his favourites are *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, *Ubik*, and *Valis*: no argument with that.)

Sutin explains that "Philip K. Dick grew up loving science fiction. He cherished his sf magazine collection from the time he was a child. When he talked about his influences, though, he did not by and large mention sf writers. A.E. van Vogt did influence him, as did Robert Heinlein... in terms of storytelling ability. And," Sutin thinks, "he was influenced by Henry Kuttner and Ray Bradbury and by the editor Anthony Boucher." (Boucher taught a writing class at his Berkeley home that Dick attended in 1951 and, as editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, bought Dick's first story "Roog.") "But," Sutin continues, "Philip K. Dick did not give lists of the science-fiction writers who influenced him. When you asked him who his influences were, generally, he talked about 'mainstream' and 'world' authors. Or philosophers. Or psychologists. Jung influenced him. James T. Farrell, creator of Studs Lonigan; Maupassant; James Joyce; and the Greek historian Xenophon."

And, because of this, Sutin argues in his Introduction to *Divine Invasions*, "Philip K. Dick remains a hidden treasure of American literature because the majority of his works were produced for a genre that almost invariably wards off serious attention. You can't write about rocket ships and be serious, can you? A great white whale serves as a literary symbol but surely the same can't be true of a telepathic Ganymedeian slime mould."

"So," he continues in conversation, "it's been a long time for Philip K. Dick. In England, there was a time when sf could simply be written and no one made a big deal about the fact that it would be labelled 'Science Fiction.' H.G. Wells could write sf and he was still a member of the literary establishment. In America, sf is still largely regarded as junk by the literary powers that be. It is a pulp genre not worthy of serious consideration" (As an aside, Sutin remarks that his bio-

graphy of Philip K. Dick was not reviewed by the *New York Times Book Review* when it was first published in the early part of 1990; yet, they review virtually every literary biography that is published.) "On the other hand, certain sf writers have managed to slip through the cracks of mainstream acceptance in America: Ursula K. Le Guin and Stanislaw Lem are two that come to mind."

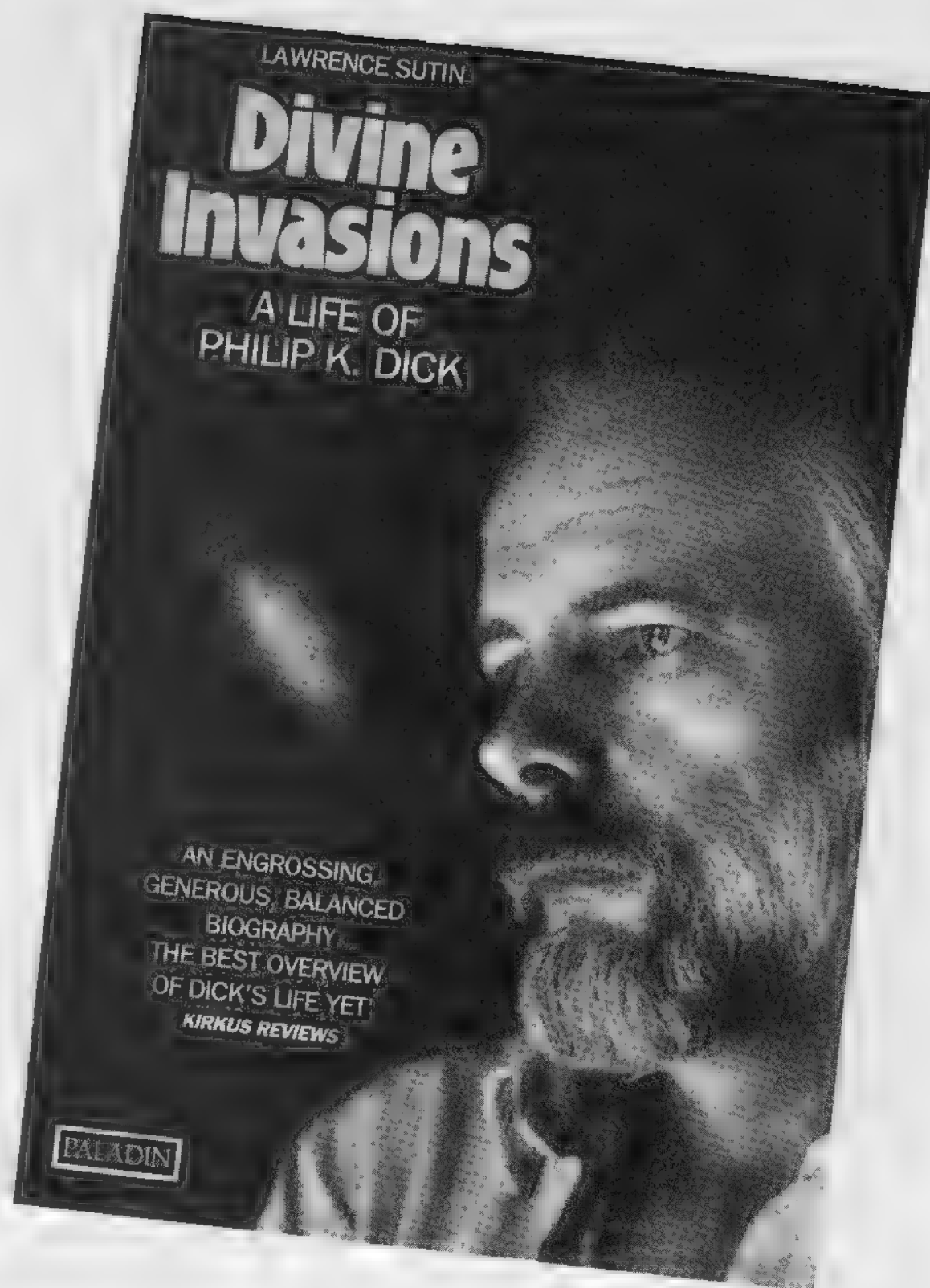
In Sutin's opinion "they wrote in a more mannered and literary style than Philip K. Dick. *Valis*, which is written in a very colloquial and direct style, in a very bizarre voice, simply puzzles people. Dick is so challenging that if you come to his works with academic literary expectations you're going to bounce off like" – Sutin clicks his fingers – "that."

In a sense, this is Philip K. Dick's tragedy. Before his first science-fiction novel was published he wrote a number of mainstream novels – *Mary and the Giant*, for example – that he was unable to sell. (And it is ironic that most of those novels have appeared since his death.) But he is, and will be, best-remembered for his sf novels: *The Man in the High Castle* (Hugo award winner, 1963), *Martian Time-Slip*, *Dr Bloodmoney*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (the basis of the film *Blade Runner*). Did he not know better than to write science fiction?

"Of course he knew better," Sutin says. "You're talking about a man who was beautifully acquainted with world literature and philosophy. Philip K. Dick was no fool. But, he loved science fiction. And, he valued writing in a truly American voice. Dick sensed that his true writing voice was a rushing, colloquial, extemporaneous voice. It's a unique sort of voice. *Valis* is so wonderful" – to Sutin – "because it is written by a man who acknowledges that he's confused and lost and looking for God. There are some people who say that *Valis* is such a woolly book." Sutin's answer to them is: "Of course it is. Here's Philip K. Dick saying: let me show you how woolly reality really is. I think it's twice as woolly as you think!"

Would Dick's impact have been greatly diminished had he written at a more leisurely pace or in a more leisurely style?

Sutin thinks not. "Philip K. Dick worked in the way that worked best for him. There's a Sufi story about a falcon who lands on a woman's windowsill. She says, Oh, poor bird, those claws on its feet must be really difficult for it to walk about on and that curved beak must be so difficult for it to peck its food with. So, she cuts the claws and the beak and the falcon is left to sit there, perplexed, and no longer able to live as it should. Dick raced through his books: that was his method, he knew no other."



It could also be said that Philip K. Dick raced through his life. He was married five times (and, subsequently, separated from each of his wives); he was plagued by nervous breakdowns (though, in Sutin's opinion, he was "surely not crazy by any standard that I would dare to apply"); he was involved in the street drug scene (though later wrote a novel, *A Scanner Darkly*, that has a vehement anti-drug theme); and, he was driven near to insanity by visions of God (or was it a stroke that he suffered in February-March of 1974?). In a sense, his fiction was autobiographical. He wrote, in his introduction to *The Golden Man*, a collection of short stories, that "people have told me that everything about me, every facet of my life, psyche, experiences, dreams and fears, are laid out explicitly in my writing, that from the

corpus of my work I can be absolutely and precisely inferred. This is true." Perhaps it is also true that – as Barry Malzberg wrote in his introduction to the volume on Philip K. Dick in the *Taplinger series, Writers of the 21st Century* – "the difference between writers of the first rank and those who are not...is that the first raters always – always – make their lives part of their collected Works." Philip K. Dick was a writer of the first rank. Sutin's biography wisely interweaves the life and the work.

"My methodology as a biographer," he explains, "was to recognize that no biographer ever arrives at the truth – with a capital T – about their subject. The role of a biographer as far as I can see is to present the ambiguities and complexities fully in such a way that a reader can savour their richness and

be puzzled by them. There are certain things that are very clear – when he married, what he thought about a particular issue. But, where there were conflicting versions of Phil among the people that knew him, or where his views on reality differed, I saw it as my job to weave together the ambiguities and the complexities in such a way that they would entertain, bemuse, and perhaps enlighten the reader. Never to impose some artificial finality on an open question for the sake of making my narrative neat and tidy and making myself out to be some iron-clad expert."

By so doing, Sutin continues, "I found that I was capable of having a great deal of sympathy for Philip K. Dick. I didn't feel apologetic about the fact that sometimes he behaved badly. I simply felt that it was my job to say so: not necessarily to admire him for those things but not to apologize for him either. In other words, I guess, one of the things I learned is that human beings are erratic, they are not perfect creatures: every life contains dark and invidious moments. I know there are other researchers into Philip K. Dick who are very uncomfortable about this."

Sutin mentions Greg Rickmann, whose biography *To the High Castle / Philip K. Dick: A Life 1928-1982* was published by Fragments West in 1989.

"I think Rickmann and I have very different approaches. Rickmann is fond of posthumous diagnostics. He's very concerned to create sympathy for Dick's failings by explaining them in terms of various physical and psychological ailments that he might have been heir to. Sometimes, I think he goes beyond the evidence to the point where I can't follow him. I feel – without specific reference to Rickmann's work but as a matter of biographical method – that to impose psychological diagnoses on a subject is reductive. I don't think that an understanding or appreciation of Dick's life is enhanced by calling him a multiple personality disorder. I don't think there is sufficient evidence to establish that he was the victim of sexual abuse as a child. So, without saying that I've written the last word on Dick and that no new facts can emerge, I'm not tempted to add to or adapt my book. And I'm damned if I can understand how Dick's novels are opened to me by such theorizing."

Sutin's biography, *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick* (published by Paladin, price £8.99) illuminates Dick's life and work. It is a relatively short book, but it says enough about the life and the work to intrigue rather than to surfeit. It is not intended to be a definitive statement. It leaves one hungry for more.

More can be found in *In Pursuit of*

Valis: Selections from the Exegesis (made by Lawrence Sutin) published by Underwood-Miller late in 1991. The *Exegesis*, subtitled by Dick "Apologia Pro Mia Vita," was written in an attempt to explain to his own satisfaction a series of sights and sounds that seized him in the period February-March 1974. It consists of some 8,000 hand-written pages, some of it quite difficult to follow. Sutin has read it all.

"Some of it," he thinks, "is not of great general interest. I am not making a biographical argument in *In Pursuit of Valis*. My principle in selecting excerpts was to print those that I thought had the highest literary, philosophical or spiritual merit. There are chapters on theoretical explorations; Philip K. Dick's personal experience in February-March 1974 and thereafter; Dick's writing techniques; plot outlines; self-examination – where Dick literally interviews himself; and a final chapter called 'Three Closing Parables' in which I pick three self-contained stories from the *Exegesis* and present them." In the *Exegesis* Dick analyses his work in an attempt to understand whether or not he could be said to have anticipated what happened to him in February-

March 1974. "It will be of interest," Sutin thinks, "to readers already familiar with Dick's novels and short stories and intrigued by them. A number of readers whose tastes run to philosophy and spirituality generally may also derive a great deal from it." But, Sutin says, "I'm quite clear that Philip K. Dick never reached any final conclusions. He loved to speculate and in the *Exegesis* you can see him saying 'yes, this is it! I finally understand the nature of reality' but, then, a few pages later... thinking about it some more."

Sutin, however, has reached a conclusion. He's through. "I've written a biography. I was the first person to read the *Exegesis*. I felt a great desire to bring the best sections of that to light. But I think I can say with absolute certainty that I am done with my task. All I wanted to do, as a lover of his fiction, was to find out who Philip K. Dick was. He made a living as a writer, writing what he wanted to write. He left some books that, as far as we can tell, will endure. He loved, and was loved by many people. He ended his life with money in the bank. I don't look at Dick's life and go: 'My God What a tragic, empty waste.'"

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1. *Locus* Nov. 1989; 2. *Locus* Feb. 1990; 3. *Locus* Feb. 1991

A Guide to Virtual Death

J.G. Ballard

For reasons amply documented elsewhere, intelligent life on earth became extinct in the closing hours of the 20th Century. Among the clues left to us, the following schedule of a day's television programmes transmitted to an unnamed city in the northern hemisphere on December 23, 1999, offers its own intriguing insight into the origins of the disaster.

6.00 am Porno-Disco. Wake yourself up with his-and-her hard-core sex images played to a disco beat.

7.00 Weather Report. Today's expected micro-climates in the city's hotel atriums, shopping malls and office complexes. Hilton International promises an afternoon snow-shower as a Christmas appetiser.

7.15 News Round-up. What our newsmakers have planned for you. Maybe a small war, a synthetic earthquake or a famine-zone/charity tie-in.

7.45 Breakfast Time. Gourmet meals to watch as you eat your diet cellulose.

8.30 Commuter Special. The rush-hour game-show. How many bottoms can you pinch, how many faces can you slap?

9.30 The Travel Show. Visit the world's greatest airports and underground car-parks.

10.30 Home-makers of Yesterday. Nostalgic scenes of old-fashioned house-work. No.7 – The Vacuum Cleaner.

11.00 Office War. Long-running serial of office gang-wars.

12.00 Newsflash. The networks promise either a new serial killer or a deadly food toxin.

1.00 pm Live from Parliament. No.12 – The Alcoholic M.P.

1.30 The Nose-Pickers. Hygiene programme for the kiddies.

2.00 Caress Me. Soft-porn for the siesta hour.

2.30 Your Favourite Commercials. Popular demand re-runs of golden-oldie TV ads.

3.00 Housewives' Choice. Rape, and how to psychologically prepare yourself.

4.00

Count-down. Game show in which contestants count backwards from one million.

5.00

Newsflash. Either an airliner crash or a bank collapse. Viewers express preference.

6.00

Today's Special. Virtual Reality TV presents "The Kennedy Assassination." The Virtual Reality head-set takes you to Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963. First you fire the assassin's rifle from the Book Depository window, and then you sit between Jackie and JFK in the Presidential limo as the bullet strikes. For premium subscribers only – feel the Presidential brain tissue spatter your face OR wipe Jackie's tears onto your handkerchief.

8.00

Dinner Time. More gourmet dishes to view with your evening diet-cellulose.

9.00

Science Now. Is there life after death? Micro-electrodes pick up ultra-faint impulses from long-dead brains. Relatives question the departed.

10.00

Crime-Watch. Will it be your home that is broken into tonight by the TV Crime Gang?

11.00

Today's Special. Tele-Orgasm. Virtual Reality TV takes you to an orgy. Have sex with the world's greatest movie-stars. Tonight: Marilyn Monroe and Madonna OR Warren Beatty and Tom Cruise. For premium subscribers only experience transexualism, paedophilia, terminal syphilis, gang-rape, and bestiality (choice: German Shepherd or Golden Retriever).

1.00 am

Newsflash. Tonight's surprise air-crash.

2.00

The Religious Hour. Imagine being dead. Priests and neuro-scientists construct a life-like mock-up of your death.

3.00

Night-Hunter. Will the TV Rapist come through your bedroom window?

4.15

Sex for Insomniacs. Soft porn to rock you to sleep.

5.00

The Charity Hour. Game show in which Third-World contestants beg for money.

Not of This World

Don Webb

It was a rain to end all rains.

John Lipscombe had made it his will to capture the great rain on canvas. He had had his life determined by rain and he would capture the wild feeling of storm, and present it to other city dwellers. If they could feel what he felt when he heard the wind, the rain, the hail, the thunder. If they could feel the rain on their bare arms better than sex and see the flash of lightning stronger than religion, then he would have succeeded in communicating a little of his essence.

It was unfortunate that John was a third-rate painter.

He'd built an unbreakable glass room atop his two-story used bookstore in downtown Austin. From his studio he could see Town Lake with rain-driven whitecaps, twenty rusting graffiti-covered water spouts on the yellow-brick buildings, and the gutters becoming brown streams of filth. He could hear the rain splashed by gale against the empty bank sky-scraper. He could feel his tiny shelter shake from thunder as lightning reached into the city.

As soon as he'd heard that hurricane Marilyn had turned inland, he'd carried his prepared canvases up the ladder and through the roof. He'd hung the "CLOSED" sign on the door. The lights were on downstairs; and had there been anyone foolish or unfortunate enough to be in the storm, they could've looked through the great glass windows at other Lipscombe masterpieces. *The Flash Flood of '81*, *Storm at Crystal Beach*, *Lightning From a Plane Window*, *Water on Water*, *Unexpected Waterfall*, *There is Another Nile in the Sky*. None of them were terribly good, but they all spoke of the quest. John had tried watercolours, pastels, collage; techniques – abstracts, neo-realism, surrealism, post-post-Impressionism; above all he kept trying to bridge the gap between himself and those who dwelt in the sunlit world. There had been haiku and sonnets, free verse and prose poems – but we'll draw the veil of kindness over these.

Beneath the shop there was a secret chamber – the opposite of that open glass case above. Where he went when the hateful sun banished the clouds. More of that later.

He'd begun to trace the outlines of the empty bank building. Its gold-tinted windows reflected the lightning in a thousand displaced squares. The wind hit the glass of his studio. The rain would smack as a solid sheet and make the golden rectangle of the bank building swirl and distort. Something dark flew by and John had to laugh. It was an umbrella. It loop-de-

looped in the strong Bernoulli currents playing around the bank building. It then went up, up as though the cloud people needed it for their protection. Sheet lightning briefly illuminated the heavy clouds. The clouds were laughing along with him.

His mother had been struck by lightning when she was three months pregnant. She had left the laundry out, and when she heard the heavy splat of rain, she ran out to gather it. The lightning hit the clothes line and she found herself flying backward. Her hands had been terribly burned, and everyone thought she would lose the baby. Poor thing. She never went out if there was a cloud in the sky. The truant officer had often come to the Lipscombe home. Naomi had kept her son home because it was overcast. Because she heard distant thunder. Eventually she retired to a windowless room safe from the elements.

Years later John would learn from his Aunt Katie, his mother's sister, that his mother had been involved in an adultery – when she forgot her wash. She had ascribed the lightning to an angry god.

He began laying down thick streaks of grey. He was laying down the shape of the storm as it crowned the bank building, when the umbrella returned. It hit the top of his studio – proving that with sufficient acceleration any glass can become breakable. It smashed through the glass roof, passed through the centre of his canvas, and embedded itself in the gravel and tar roof which was the floor of John's studio. If it had fallen four inches to the right, it would have pierced his hand. His sense of relief was over-powered by an intense sensation of what he first thought was pleasure. When his father let him touch dry ice and he didn't know if it was cold or hot.

But it wasn't pleasure, it was pain. He looked at his hand. The rain was eating clear to the bone. He leapt back, clawing for the trapdoor he'd sawn through the roof. He half-climbed, half-fell down the ladder. He knocked over a rotating display of western paperbacks. He fell on sliding Zane Greys and his aching dissolving hand smeared into the crusty yellow-green shag carpet.

He wasn't too clear on what followed – he made it to the restroom somehow – covered the hand in bandages – not thinking too clearly – should've dialled 911 – Zeus threw an umbrella at me – and passed out.

He woke to the drip drip drip of the storm being over and the water sluicing through the waterspout. The dripping sound segued into a rapping – a gentle

tapping - on the bookstore door. A plague of gargoyles upon yonder customer, thought John, for his mind was still filled with water spouts. He probably shouldn't let anyone in, but answering a door was easier than thinking about it. So through the unlit store and open the door.

Outside framing the golden bank building was a three-quarters rainbow. Standing in the doorway with a knowing smile on his fat lips was Pel Terry, with his customary sack of paperback junk gathered at garage sales to be traded for a couple of valuable volumes.

"My god," said the fat man, "what's happened to your hand?"

John said, "I burnt it badly - knocked my tea kettle over."

"I hope it doesn't affect your painting. Knowing your tastes I lingered at the adult literary fair till the storm had subsided."

Pel stepped in and John stepped back. Pel placed the brown paper bag on the counter. John became aware that his hand didn't hurt. Maybe it had been some dream, but he could hardly unbandage his hand, now, in front of a loyal (if irritating) customer. The whole incident seemed unreal - or perhaps belonging to another reality. The fat man was on his way to the Science Fiction loft when he paused and said, "You should've come to the fair, John, I met the most remarkably endowed waif. I shall clean her up, teach her to read, and teach her some other pleasures as well," he leered. "It is my life ambition to pygmalionize - better than writing or painting, old fellow."

There had always been rumours about Pel. The man possessed the most extraordinary appetites and the will to obtain them. But there were darker rumours too. Magic. Orgies. Consorting with things beyond this world. Perhaps this modern-day Oliver Haddo could offer some advice on the afternoon's events.

When Pel returned with Clark Ashton Smith volumes and his Charles Brockden Brown, John was ready. John asked, "Do you know anything about melting?"

"As in, 'I'm melting, I'm melting'?" Pel did an astonishing imitation of the Wicked Witch.

"Well, sort of - any mythic or psychological references?"

"Since you're an English major I ought to go back to your roots. In the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, we see melting of things that don't belong. Anything from another branch of the world tree. When Beowulf slays Grendel, the latter melts. When Beowulf is through with the giant-forged sword, it melts. Of course Lovecraft was fond of melting alien entities - Wilbur Whateley or the fungi from Yuggoth. Presumably they melt because their real essence cannot be held by this world. Melting or dissolving is a common fate for assorted weirdies in *Naked Lunch*."

"What do you mean, their essence can't be held by this world?"

"Their real selves belong somewhere else."

"Is there any cure for melting?"

"One of Lovecraft's characters managed a good existence by refrigerated air - but of course in the end it was the slime for him. Hypnosis won Mr Poe's recommendation in 'The Case of M. Valdemar' but in the long run - it's down the drain."

"Are there any diseases - real-world diseases - that dissolve the flesh?"



Illustrations by Michael Reilly

"Jungle rot, I believe, will liquefy the flesh and, of course, we've overlooked Frosty the Snowman."

"Thanks, that's proven invaluable."

"Going to do a painting of a monster melting in the rain?"

"Maybe."

Pel purchased his books and stepped onto the street. The "CLOSED" sign still shielded the store from less dedicated print customers. John undid his bandage. The flesh was pretty much the way he remembered it – a couple of holes where raindrops had passed clear through and lots of ragged edges where he had simply melted away. Painless – and although the flesh was red, bloodless. He covered the wound and got out the phone book – looking for nearby minor emergency centres. There was one not too far away. If he went now, he could probably have his wound dressed and be able to open the shop for a few hours tonight.

He turned off lights, checked the doors, and as he walked to his car he asked himself what he would tell them. Somehow "bad acid rain" seemed silly. They could hold him over for psychiatric evaluation. Or if they believed that, there would be the papers, the radio, the TV. He could see the headlines: SECOND-RATE PAINTER GETS BURNED BY SUBJECT. He suddenly felt betrayed by the rain. He'd tried to bring the rain to the people, but the rain had rejected him. This was a personal thing between him and the rain. He would have to sort this matter out before he brought outsiders in. Pel didn't count. All Pel did was buy books. No, he once bought *Rain on a Sixth Street Alley*. Maybe he could talk to Pel about this – reveal this secret of not being like everyone else.

He went back to the store and business as usual. His last customer, a blue-haired lady who bought romances by the grocery bag-full, told him that there was a simply glorious sunset outside – really he should go see it. He thanked her and turned the sign to read "CLOSED." He went to the chamber beneath the store. It was the same size as the chamber above 4' x 6' x 8', and in many ways its opposite. Everyone knew about the glass box. There the obvious exercise of art was displayed – this place was for the hidden aspect.

Save for John no one knew of this chamber. He had found the space while putting in a new hot water heater. Crawling beneath the basement to install the emergency runoff, his hand had encountered emptiness. At first he had mythologized the empty room. A bootlegging cellar seemed likely, or perhaps it had simply been a basement for the structure that preceded the bookstore. John had put in a trapdoor, a ladder, and wired the room for light and sound. He concealed the trapdoor with a worn Oriental rug.

He'd hung blue fluorescents in the ceiling, and painted the walls to suggest ocean depths. There was a tape player and a hammock. He had all sorts of tapes: whale songs, thunderstorms, waves, gentle rain. He would come and lie on the hammock, turn on the tape and dream of fantastic oceans and majestic storms not of this world.

He lay on the hammock with the thunderstorm tape. He couldn't figure out why the rain had turned against

him. After ten minutes the tape had its usual effect and he began to snooze. He dreamed of being in a small dinghy on a vast ocean. His mother was with him. Her cheap Sears housedress was drenched and kelp hung from her hair and flecks of foam remained on her wet skin. The sky was cloudy and the waves were very high and sharp like the roofs of Gothic cathedrals. The clouds parted and a moon was born. It wasn't our moon, but a mauve moon. His mother kept trying to get him to watch the foam flying from the tops of the waves. The gravity of this world must be less (or the pull of the vast purplish moon more). The foam would fly off the waves as isolate flecks of mauve. It would hang in the air forever or longer, but would finally fall back into the ocean. He wanted to ask her what she meant, but when he looked around she was gone. One of the tall waves lifted the dinghy. He was about to fall off and was grabbing for the edge of the craft when he overturned the hammock and fell onto the silent tape player. For the first time he was scared in his secret chamber.

He had ruined the tape player and the blue lights scared him and it was a while before he stood up.

He had only meant to stay in his secret place for a couple of hours. Then he would go home, to his two-bedroom, painting-lined apartment. But it was five in the morning and he knew that he wouldn't get any sleep. He had shaving gear in the shop – for he often spent the night to paint or inventory books. He cut the stubble off his face, fixed a pot of overly strong coffee, and decided to stay up.

His wound had healed somewhat. It didn't look so raw, but there were still holes clear through his hand. *I'm an art martyr, he thought, my stigmata.*

When the rosy fingers of dawn appeared, he decided to risk the roof. Some glass fell past him as he opened the trapdoor. Bits of canvas lay in a strange thick blue liquid, and the spike of the umbrella still impaled the asphalt. He pulled it free, and otherwise began the cleanup.

After he had swept up the glass and canvas (and sponged up the blue goo), he went down into the store looking for a plate. He kept a couple of plates to eat off. One of them – a blue-edged plate bought at Pirate's Den junkstore – covered the hole created by the umbrella. He duct-taped it onto the glass.

Nobody asked about his bandaged hand all day.

In his apartment he prepared for a shower. He smelled like a three-days-dead horse, but felt nowhere near that fresh. He stepped into the tub, his right foot coming into contact with a small amount of water from his last shower.

It was immediate pain.

He jumped back. Out of the tub.

The small droplets had become thick and blue. There were holes on the sole of his foot the same size and shape as the droplets.

He stared at the blue liquid a long time. He gathered up as much as he could into a brown plastic pill bottle.

The hardest part of learning to live without water was Kool-Aid. He discovered that he could drink water as long as he blended it with some flavouring. Kool-Aid was the cheapest flavouring, and he drank it until his lips became a permanent purple.

He could wash himself in rubbing alcohol, but he never quite smelled normally. He stayed indoors a lot.

Sometimes it would rain and he would be trapped. With luck and care, he managed never to be trapped at a shopping mall or a grocery store.

His social life – never very active – ceased. He couldn't go to movies. Weather can change in two hours, and it might be raining when it was time to leave. He began living at the shop, after two days of spring storms had kept him at his apartment.

He had to pay to have his laundry done, and he began to eat out of cans or on paper plates.

He had to give up painting. He had never needed models, but even picturing storms would make him shake and sweat (which, fortunately, like other bodily fluids was noncorrosive). At first he raged. When storms came he would curse the rain and rage at the sky. But then he began to look upon the storm-painting years as a season of grace – a happy moment that the storm gods had given him away from his normal (for now he had begun to see it as so) soluble state. When he had found serenity, his paintings began to sell from his shop walls. This he regarded as a second kind of grace, that these fearsome objects of beauty would begin to trouble him no more. The Austin-American Statesman ran a short feature on his art, and he achieved a measure of fame.

There were accidents, of course. One cannot live on this planet without encountering water. A customer shaking out an umbrella burned a hole in his cheek – so he learned to close the shop when it was wet. One of the pipes that ran between the second and first floors began to drip and scalded his scalp. He was pretty sure some of his brain had been converted into the blue liquid. Even a wisp of fog drilled tiny holes in his left arm.

Some of his customers noticed these changes. They muttered among themselves, speculating if John had some strange disease. A few avoided his store, some microwaved the books they purchased, most did nothing at all. It was a decade of strange diseases on a dying planet.

One night, about a week after he sold his last painting, he dreamed of the small boat. Once more the tiny craft was tossed by the night ocean of an alien world. Even though the contracting muscles of wave walls would lift his dinghy very high, he felt safe and secure – nourished by the blood smell of the ocean. His mother rode with him, a kind of pal, pointing out the features of the alien shore. This was a childhood he'd missed. A mother should explain the world to her child feature by feature. His mother began to cry – she was truly sorry for having kept him away from the rain and the water. She said something about the sea foam, but between her sobbing and the waves, John couldn't make it out. She tried to dry her face with her wet house dress. Then she managed a brave smile and rolled off the boat, beginning to swim (perhaps turning into a mermaid).

He woke on his cot behind the counter. He marvelled at the dream so intently that it was several seconds before he heard the thunderstorm outside.

Suddenly the dream became clear to him and as this meaning rose in him it transformed the real world into the intensity of dream. He got up from his cot,



looking for the steel office chair he kept next to the register. He was like the sea foam. He was the sea foam. Some wave had lifted him from his native world

like the foam he had hovered in another world, briefly obeying its laws; like the foam it was time to fall back. Pel Terry had been right. Alien things melt because this world cannot hold their essence. He found the chair by lightning flash and ran through the store and up the stairs, the crusty carpet scratching his feet. In the Science Fiction loft he pulled down the ladder to the roof.

Every flash of lightning threw light and shadow in crazy angles from the shop's five windows. For an instant there were six Johns on six ladders, but the shadows died and the real John emerged on the roof. If he could move quickly enough the rain would take him back to his home. He pulled the chair through the trapdoor, and raised it over his head. Lightning revealed the plate still taped to the glass roof. He struck there with the legs of the chair. Five blows. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. He knocked a huge jagged hole to the pouring sky.

The water covered him and the pain (or perhaps the ecstasy) was beyond human understanding.

Don Webb is the author of numerous short stories and the small-press collection *Uncle Ovid's Exercise Book*. He last appeared here with "The End of the World" (issue 52). He also features in the latest issue of Isaac Asimov's *SF Magazine* which we have to hand, with an sf western called "Billy Hauser" (December 1991). Don tells us that he also contributes occasional stories to "respectable" publications like *Fiction International*, and that he has a chapbook coming out in the spring of 1992 from Wordcraft of Oregon.

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The Big Yellow Car

Diane Mapes

It was the newspaper article buried in the F section of the *Sunday Times* — snug up against one of those huge department store mattress sale ads — that made me think of the big yellow car. The memory came back, smelly and yellow, like the newsprint I'd used to line the bottom of the cat's litter box.

I had the car when I was a kid, although it wasn't your conventional type of automobile, not even conventional for a farm kid used to playing on or around forklifts, tractors and old red and white flatbed trucks that ruminated more than ran.

It looked like one of those spools that power or telephone companies use to wrap their cable around; in fact, that's what we all thought it was the whole time we played with it. At least for the most part. Kids have a tendency not to question things that are strange because they are just kids and they don't know really if they're supposed to be that way or not. I never stopped to ask my dad when he pushed a peanut butter sandwich in my sister Mary's face or broke the pancake platter over my head if that was the normal disciplinary action taken for a kid who burped at the dinner table or wiped egg yolks on the tablecloth, and I never stopped to wonder why that big yellow car looked like a big wooden telephone cable spool when my mom or dad came around, but other times would be smooth and glow with a dull radiance like the Tin Man's face in *The Wizard of Oz*.

My two older sisters and I found the spool one day out behind the barn after we got bored building forts underneath stacks of my dad's haybales and trying to find the exact spot where my mom buried the evil Aztec doll that the Mexican kids brought up to camp with them the year before. The spool was nearly hidden by the crabgrass and weeds that always lurked between the barn and the cabins where the Mexican families lived those summer months that they picked my dad's strawberries and hoed his beans. It was lying flat when we came upon it, like a small table for two out on the veranda of a long-abandoned roadside café.

"What's that?" my sister Mary asked, poking at it with a stick from one of the maples that lined the front drive to our house, sticks that my mom and dad often called switches.

"It's an old part off of one of the tractors," my sister Gloria answered immediately. Gloria was the eldest of us four kids, skinny and owlish and a dirty fighter if it came down to it — which it often did. She'd taken after me with a coat hanger once for sitting in her chair during *You Asked For It*.

"Doesn't look like a part to me," Mary said and we gathered around the spool, brushing away the weeds and crabgrass and withered blackberry vines as well as our little sister Frances, who had followed us out that day. "It looks like one of those things. You know. Only metal." The four of us nodded, even Gloria had to admit it looked like one of those things, then we gathered closer and began to poke around it, trying to rile some spiders or — best case scenario — scare up a mouse which we could use to torment our youngest sister.

Frances was always the brunt of our jokes. I regularly prepared a mixture of cascara berries, dirt, spider eggs and spit which I would bury for a number of days and then coax her to drink. My older sisters would play a demented version of "Chicken" with her where she would lie on the ground under the swingset while they would swing over her, assuring her that she had indeed won that round each time they kicked her in the face. The most pathetic thing about Frances, of course, was the abject acceptance with which she drank the old jam jars full of poison, endured the mice in her bed, or took the muddy Ked across the chin. It seemed that Frances had not been born, but had surrendered herself unto the world and all of its hurts. Sometimes, I think the world sensed that.

"Betcha can't lift it," my sister Mary said, dropping to her knees to peer into the squashed white grass at its base.

"Betcha I don't want to lift it," Gloria said, feigning boredom.

Mary scrambled to her feet and fit her shoulder underneath the top rim. The spool shifted easily. Gloria dropped the boredom act and helped. I helped, too. Frances just stood back, watching with big eyes.

"Bet there's a snake under there," Mary said, turning around to grin at her. "Bet it'll crawl out from under here and bite you."

"I don't like snakes," Frances said. But she didn't move. I had once seen Frances stand patiently while a dog growled a long, low warning, then bit her full in the face.

I let go of the spool and bent to look under it; my feet were too close to risk being crawled on by a snake, imaginary or not. There wasn't a snake amid the tangled fleshy grass that lay beneath the spool, but there was something flat and grey that might have once been a mole if it hadn't been so thin and if it had had fur on it. I thought about showing it to Mary and Gloria so they could chase Frances back to the house with it, but decided it was too icky even for her. I pushed

it out of sight with the toe of my shoe and stood up to help my sisters right the spool. As it settled onto its rims, I felt heat come off of it and sensed something stir within it or within me, I couldn't be sure which.

It was nothing more than a raised eyebrow, a puzzlement, a question, half-formed. The feeling quickly passed, or at least the noticing of that feeling passed, as did the impression that the spool had been made of smooth cold metal. It was rough wood, of course, the paint chipping away like my dried skin from a sunburn the previous August. I dug a grimy thumbnail into its soft, spongy surface as we hoisted it, quickly carved my initials out of halfmoons, marking it as mine as was my habit during that time.

Once having righted the spool, my sisters and I stood back breathing hard, examining its worn yellow and grey surface for pieces of cow pie or clinging balled-up slugs. Finding none, we promptly rolled the spool away from the barn and the Mexican cabins and around towards the front yard of our house. It took only a few moments to realize we could ride it as well.

Gloria, as the oldest sister, had first dibs on the big yellow car of course. Settling herself on the wooden slats that formed the inner drum, she ordered Mary and me to aim the car in the direction of the house and then took off. Mary and I stepped back, watching as Gloria moved her hands along the edges of the "tyres," pushing, as she scooted her butt back and forth along the seat in order to keep the car's centrifugal force from carrying her to the ground.

It did, finally, but not before she had travelled a good thirty feet. Mary climbed aboard next, managing to stay on even longer and successfully navigate the gentle bit of hill that sloped down from the front of our barn to the corn at the back of our garden.

Eventually, I got my turn on the big yellow car, too, although my maiden voyage was less successful than my two older sisters – not only did the turning drum carry me to the ground, the yellow car's wheels ran over my ankle and left hand. Oddly enough, it didn't hurt – the wood of the big yellow car seemed to soften and mould over the top of my skin and bone, malleable as Jell-O – although I milked the incident for whatever sympathy I could eke out of my two older sisters, which in the presence of this new wonderful toy, did not amount to much. They merely took my turn until I quit whining and pushed them out of the way. The big yellow car seemed to pull at us all, calling for our attention, our touch. Frances, of course, was only allowed to watch.

And so, our summer routine was set.

The three of us rode the big yellow car all around the farm that summer: out behind the barn, weaving in among the cabins where we would gather with the Mexican kids after dark and read graphic accounts from the *National Enquirer* of the scores of mutilated bodies discovered in the hills around the Rio Grande; down the lane past the old, abandoned house where my sister Gloria had shown me three years earlier that by stepping on the stomach of a recently slaughtered pig, I could see fresh, undigested grass squirt out; up to the pumphouse which regulated the flow of water from our well, from which my father had once pulled the bloated bodies of three

moles after the neighbour's hired man had knocked the top off and neglected to let us know.

My father would often shake his head – and at times his fist – as the snail's pace of our big yellow car held up his truck loaded down with flats of blood-red strawberries bound for the cannery in town. Often, we would have to push the car out of the gravel lane and into the sandrushes and blackberry bushes at the side, pressing our bodies back against the cool yellow metal of the car – now splintered grey wood as my father trundled past. The car was always grey wood for him and for my mother, never the cool glasslike metal that my sisters and I would run our hands over, feeling the thrum within, feeling and dismissing it as easily as we dismissed the touch within our minds that told us to set the pregnant cat atop the drum for a few seconds one day until it began to claw at our hands and we had to let it go, to squish handfuls of rotten strawberries into its smooth sides another, without once wondering where the pulpy sweet juice had been sucked so quickly, so completely.

After a time, as with most new toys, the novelty of the big yellow car wore off and, as if sensing this, the car began to take on new and different shapes for our amusement. One day, it would flatten itself out and let us ride, all three, upon its saucer-like rim, around and around the swampy fields down below, as our father let us ride on a set of bound planks behind his tractor whenever he wanted to smooth the freshly-ploughed dirt in our garden. Another day, it would stretch itself tall until its rims scraped the telephone wires and Mary would scramble to the top on metal steps that would slowly disappear afterwards, much like the red lash marks from our father's belt, to stand up on the drum's middle, walking it along like a nine-year-old circus performer on a huge creaking barrel. Other times, usually after my mother had come home from the strawberry fields, the car would remain as a simple spool, sometimes wood, sometimes not, that we would push through the yard after cats or use for an offshoot of another "Chicken" game my sister Gloria had devised wherein one of us would lie down on the grass as another would slowly roll the big yellow car over the top of them.

Somehow or another, I ended up assuming Frances' role as goat in this game, most likely because she was not allowed anywhere near the big yellow car. ("She'll poke her eye out," was my mother's standard explanation, although there was nothing on or attached to the spool, at least not that she could perceive, that could possibly accomplish this. Thinking back on it now, it seems my mother might have sensed something amiss with our car but could express it no more articulately, although as I do not talk to her these days, I cannot say if this is correct). Many afternoons I spent lying on the cool green lawn that spread from the house to the barn, spread thick as flies on the carcass of a premature calf I had seen once while walking through the fields, waiting for the big yellow car to roll over the top of me, something akin, I always felt, to lying between two railroad tracks awaiting a train.

Late in the summer, we stuffed rocks and bits of wood and glass and even a balled-up slug or two into some holes that had opened up at the centre of the car, and afterwards our afternoon rides

were accompanied by pleasant hollow thunkings. We took colour crayons and chalk and felt pens to the smooth sheen of the outside wheels, drawing elaborate automotive accessories – headlights, tailfins; we even etched a huge pair of dice onto the drum's middle.

The touch from inside the spool came and went – curious, hungry – like a calf sucking on its mother's teat. We let it suckle at our minds, let it feel our father's fist as it punched our bellies, let it grasp the delightful disgust at seeing the half-chewed body of the pregnant cat's newborn kitten hanging from a tom's mouth. It wanted to know us, wanted to be us and we gladly let it. It was only a fair trade, after all, for a summer's entertainment.

When my younger sister Frances insisted on being allowed to join in our fun one morning while our mom was off getting milk at the neighbour's, we pulled the holes that had appeared in the side a little wider, our small hands stretching them back like the veterinarian and my father peeling open the belly of a put-down cow to save its prize calf.

"Want a ride, Frances?" my sister Mary asked, grinning wide. I remember that her breath smelled like hay; there was hay in her hair, too. And in Frances' from climbing around on top of the bales, trying to find the hidden entrance to our fort.

"You won't let me," Frances said, looking at each of us, much as she had looked at the dog before it bit her in the face. "You never let me ride."

"We'll let you this time," Gloria said. "It's your turn."

We picked Frances up and stuffed her inside the big yellow car, picturing her rolling around inside the drum like a bundle of clothes in a dryer while we jauntily journeyed the countryside.

My mother, of course, was concerned, and then frantic, when Frances didn't come in for dinner that night – or the next – and perhaps at the time we were bothered by the way the holes seemed to close up overnight especially before we could retrieve our sister from inside, but the excitement of the police and the search parties and the curious sight of our father's twisted, white face more than compensated for any concern we felt for her. Over time, what worries we did have subsided, as did the half-formed questions that had emanated from the big yellow car as we played on it each day.

I don't remember if it was the start of school or the inevitable onset of winter that finally put the big yellow car to rest for good, but eventually it was back behind the barn again, tipped on its side, patiently awaiting the nest of spiders or mice or snakes that might inhabit it, blackberry vines and crabgrass slowly and insidiously encompassing it as the onset of adulthood has since done to me. The crayoned drawings on its side faded over the years, melding with the soft pastels of lichen and moss. The rocks, and the other things we'd stuffed in its centre, stayed silent.

Now and again, I think of the big yellow car, as I have on this day while reading a piss-soaked newspaper account of a missing child in some rural pocket of northwest Montana, wondering if that child had sisters and if those sisters had grown up with a ghost

that called to them for succour from the inside of wooden spools, of tin cans, of bottle after bottle of cheap red wine. Now and again, I think of the ravaged womb of a cow and the grainy *Enquirer* photos of decapitated virgins, I think of the stomach of the pig squirting half-digested grass onto my red rubber over-shoes simply because I was curious, simply because I wanted to know.

Now and again, I think of the answer to the pressing question that my sisters and I stuffed inside the spool as blithely as if she were a rock or a balled-up slug, the cool metal spool so reminiscent of the Tin Man's chest, down to the undisputed presence of a heart inside, however still.

I think of my initials carved in the side of a drum and of that drum's steady thrumming out across the stars. I think of these things, wondering who was it that wanted to know, wondering what exactly did we teach them?

Diane Mapes wrote "Shallow Grave" (*Interzone* 46) and "Remnants" (*IZ* 50). She describes the above story as "semi-autobiographical, as you may have guessed; I've even left my sisters' names the same, including poor Frances. My little sister was the butt of many of our cruel jokes growing up, and with this story I am perhaps trying, finally, to apologize ..."

FOR SALE

Interzone: The 2nd Anthology. Paperback edition, New English Library, 1988. Stories by J.G. Ballard, Gregory Benford, Thomas M. Disch, Garry Kilworth, Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman, Rachel Pollack, John Shirley & Bruce Sterling, Brian Stablerford, Ian Watson and others – fine tales which the *Times* described as having "the quality of going right to the edge of ideas which can chill as well as warm." It's now officially out of print, but we have obtained some remainder copies for resale to *IZ* readers at just over half the original cover price – £1.75 (including postage & packing; £2.75 overseas; \$5 USA).

Earth is the Alien Planet: J.G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare. A monograph by David Pringle, Borgo Press, 1979. Covers all Ballard's work from "The Violent Noon" in 1951 up to the eve of publication of *The Unlimited Dream Company* in 1979. Still in print in the USA but long hard to obtain in Britain. Now copies are available from *Interzone* at £3.50 each (including postage & packing; £4.50 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

For either or both items please send a cheque or postal order for the appropriate amount to: *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. You may also pay by Access (MasterCard) or Visa card: please send us your card-holder's name, address, card expiry date and signature.

Mutant Popcorn

Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

I'd like to see Joseph Campbell on the bonfire, frankly. Apart from the brain-softening effect on decades of (mainly American) students of all that sub-sub-Jungian new age twaddle proclaiming itself as scholarship, there's something rather offensive in the suggestion that a phenomenon as globally complex and diverse as the anthropology of narrative can be reduced to a cheap narcissistic metaphor of psychic growth. The fact that this stuff is gaining rather than losing ground our side of the Atlantic isn't a pretty development. But the really alarming trend is the way it seems to be seeping into the screenwriting courses. George Lucas, a man with a badly Californian brain, is clearly the chief villain here, flannelling on about how if it wasn't for his old guru Joe Star Wars would never have changed the history of film. And in Hollywood, at least, where there's a huge sucker market for simple-minded classical reductionist explanations of triumphantly nonlinear processes like movie success, this soft cheesy camembert of an analysis sells like diet plans. (See e.g. Linda Seger, *Making a Good Script Great*, Samuel French 1987 - a central text for understanding what happened to the Hollywood script in the 1980s.) No matter that if you do set out systematically to apply the magic formula you end up with a pile of goat's poo like *Willow*. Faith is indestructible.

And some of this poo has plainly rubbed off on Richard La Gravenese, the much-noticed tyro screenwriter of *The Fisher King*. To call this script a sow's ear would be an insult to a noble organ. Even after a very large number of hapless and talented people have blistered themselves trying to stitch it into some approximation of an attractive fashion accessory, streams of loose change keep on tumbling out the bottom. Rarely has such a vacuous piece of tosh been dressed up with such undeserved love and sacrifice. It's an enterprise from which pretty much everyone emerges with enormous credit: the director, Terry Gilliam, for hewing something so consistently watchable and very largely enjoyable from this heap of portentous twaddle; the producers, for spotting a never-to-

be-repeated bargain in the unnaturally depressed stock level of a director otherwise unpurchasable at any price; the four principals, for getting so much life out of styrofoam characters with motivation gaps you could sail a yacht through; Gilliam's hardworking cinematographer Roger Pratt, and a whole gang of obviously very well-employed designers. Why anyone should have thought the project deserved it is an impenetrable movie-land mystery, but commercially and, in a measure, artistically the investment's paid very nicely off.

But honestly, what an appalling misuse of the human brain. For starters, just look at the moral, which explains how to redeem yourself for causing the deaths of seven people through glib and cynical bantering with the fragile contents of people's heads. Do you maybe jack in your radio job, retrain as a volunteer medic, and head off to the Sudan to save seven thousand lives in a refugee camp? Uh-n. You jack in your radio job, retrain as a video store employee, and fix up a relationship for a couple of goofy NY cases, Robin Williams type meets Mia Farrow type over entertaining scene of dumplings & noodles - after which you can feel so good about yourself that you can walk back into your old job, inexplicably sever all ties with all characters except the now-comatose Williams, and enter on a new plot career burgling sports trophies off of millionaires. No mess, no fuss, no need even to patch things up with the pal with AIDS you cut dead a few scenes back, or the new beautiful girlfriend you claim to have taken up with offstage: just go back to your old girl and tell her you love her, and everyone will forgive you and the whole world will be healed. Miracle of redemption or what.

And then there's the plotting. Here is a universe where narrative lines are wrapped up by the sight of a banner headline reading ACCIDENTAL SUICIDE THWARTED BY NIGHT PROWLER. (The first two words alone are a richly meditable charm to raise the spirits, but the third lifts them out of the body altogether.) Here is a world where the psychic shock of seeing the

face blown off your elegant Mrs (an uncanny ringer for the one who keeps looking at the camera in the Playtime Popcorn ad) can catapult an ordinary college professor into such widely-recognized depressive symptoms as zany irrepressibility, camping out among big ducts, hallucinating the knight out of the beginning of *Time Bandits*, and eventual old-movie catatonia ("I'm afraid there's no way of telling when he'll awaken," &c.). It's a world where story chronology, character behaviour, and the structure of cause and effect are subject to abrupt and mysterious jumps, and where especially in the long, long stretch past the ninety-minute mark more or less anything can happen for more or less no reason at all.

And none of this is helped by its fairly inept assimilation to a mythic template straight out of first-semester Eng Lit. Wearing its course credit on its sleeve, *The Fisher King* trumpets its cod-literary conceit in title, surface content, and great sirloin slabs of dialogue exposition necessarily, since nobody in the outside world knows or cares a blind toss about Arthurian "myth" (i.e. texts you don't actually have to read in order to be able to extract their essence). It's not enough for the lead characters to heal one another's psychic wounds by playing in turn the role of fool; there has to be a real castle, a literal grail, an actual knight riding around Central Park all, of course, scrubbed and disinfected of any actual detectably Christian associations. This is intellectual tinsel of the most specious kind, helped not at all by passing it off as the academic confabulations of ex-prof "Parry" (nudge nudge nudge).

And yet, of course, the resulting film is very far from wretched. Hired hand Gilliam has made a mighty effort to invest something personal in this claptrap - turning the lead figures into facets of self-portraiture, their downfalls into a half-allegory of Munchausen, the love plot into a Brazilian romantic obsession, and (above all) the street-level panorama of Manhattan life into an instantly recognizable personal vision of warm little people in huge, dark, big-angled vistas. The strange epic treatment certainly doesn't damage the story's intimacy,



Robin Williams in 'The Fisher King'

and even disarms it of some of its insistent preciousness. The comedy plays very well, the whole thing looks fabulous, and Amanda Plummer scoops every scene into an enormous sack marked SWAG. It's a shame Gilliam isn't always that great at script-fixing, because here if ever was a piece that (especially in the Bridges-Ruehl scenes) could have used it; but if he's being at all kosher about the directing job on this one being basically a finger exercise, it's in general a disgracefully masterful performance. I just pray it doesn't spawn any imitations. I doubt civilization could survive *Iron John Goes to Broadway*.

There's an obvious comparison here with *Dead Again*. Both are mainstream studio debuts by notoriously auteurist megalomaniacs from this side of the planet, staking their careers at a vulnerable moment on a script from deep within the Hollywood system. Both have triumphed, commercially and to a point critically, in the face of all kinds of hostile expectation. Both, as it happens, have Robin Williams doing his wacky mentor routine, the overcompassionate genius humanitarian who has flown too close to the heat of human suffering and fried the wax that glues his head together, so that he now hangs out in meat lockers/big duct places dispensing zany offbeat wisdom. Both turn on the healing of catatonic states resulting

from mind-stonkingly improbable psychological trauma. And most importantly, both set out to breathe stylish life into utterly risible scripts that were surely only rescued from the second circle of turnaround hell by a bizarre conspiracy of improbable moviebiz accidents. In the case of *Dead Again*, it must surely be (as poor, brave Dez Jacobi has to mouth in one of many, many unspeakable lines) "thanks to fate – the only cosmic force with a tragic sense of humour."

Well, I don't think there's much mileage left in the "Kenneth Branagh – new Eisenstein or smug little waz-zock who wants his head kicked?" debate. But what I would say about *Dead Again* is that (i) anyone who can turn this astonishing monument to screenwriting ineptitude into a picture that more people across America want to see than any other, is either born brilliant or born dead lucky; (ii) why anyone *did* want to see it is way outside my range to conceive. All right, it's been a thin year, but who'd have ever thought there'd be room for a hit thriller based round a wisecracking private eye called "Mike Church" who seems to leave his front door open (in LA yet) for anyone to walk straight into his living room; a hypnotist antique dealer into past-life regression ("To cure him," it is eventually explained, a London psychiatrist "told him about hypnosis and reincarnation"); and a positive epidemic of rare black-and-

white movie diseases (daft accents, rampant flashbacks, never-explained amnesia, and even a vital red herring involving a character with a "weak heart")? (What was the last film with one of those? *Les Diaboliques*?) Baffling dialogue abounds: "It's okay," says our Ken at the end: "the door just closed." (Eh? what door?). Or: "There must be a certain kind of freedom comes with living only in the present. At least you don't spend your whole time trying to forget your past." (What past? dagnabbed if we ever find out.) Ironically, given the (erm-hm) leit-motiv of scissors, loose ends trail from every border of the fabric, and the sheer preposterousness of the premise isn't helped by the great clumsy wedges of voiceover in the already hugely cumbersome exposition.

As for KB's contribution, assessments clearly differ. It certainly looked to me, as to most UK viewers, like a memorably bad performance (when he's surprised, his jaw actually drops – keep an eye!) and an appalling display of bad directorial technique: the fussy lighting passing for visual flair, lots of staging of scenes in "interesting" locations to fill in for the flatness of the dialogue, and some terribly overdone melodramatic effects (the budget thunderstorms, the laboured scissor pans, the crashing chords as he fluffs the heroine's name, the oh-do-come-off-it ending). But maybe this is just an oversensitive response born of allergic

reaction to an incomparably dreadful script. At least the whole thing is such an unlikely imbroglio that curiosities are never far around the corner; and if you wait long enough Derek Jacobi's stutter gets a long-awaited cameo. Best of all, nobody anywhere is hung up over their inability to tell nearest and dearest they love them; and the process of psychic healing has nothing to do with mythic patterns spiritual growth and learning to make commitments, and everything to do with kicking guns across a roomful of pointy sculptures. If *The Fisher King* still beats up on this stuff with both arms in plaster, it's probably because Gilliam is still a great, great filmmaker and young Kenny is still a wee bit of a prat. But both have bettered themselves substantially by the shooter-for-hire experience: and next time around, at least, neither will have the excuse.

(Nick Lowe)

Tube Corn TV Reviews by Wendy Bradley

Zzzsap! I know, I know, it's pathetic, isn't it – nothing but a pale imitation of that authoritative neon crackle that currently begins all science-fiction and fantasy television, but I was unable to persuade David Pringle of the advisability of installing the necessary electrodes between pages 39 and 40 so we could recreate the effect in the comfort of your own home as soon as you turned the page to this article.

You will have to make do, instead, with watching the BBC's Christmas offering, *Merlin of the Crystal Cave*, in which the initial crackle came from the sword in the stone, when an unfortunately mogadon-faced Arthur looked slightly peeved he didn't get the same neon-blue kick out of its hilt that everyone else seemed to.

The BBC only let me preview episodes 1 and 5 of this six-part serial so I am unable to comment on the "building Stonehenge" sequence with which the serial was to climax, but from the bits I did see I suspect a wicked sense of humour on the part of the camera person and a complete lack of humour on the part of the director. Did he not even notice in episode one that panning slowly down a line of po-faced helmeted soldiers from a low angle produces an irresistible conviction that they are about to burst into song and do:

"We're knights of the round table,
Our shows are formidable,
but many times
we're given rhymes
that are quite unsingable?"

The big question I was left with after the preview was whether the BBC's Stonehenge will make us reel and rock with Spinal Tap-induced mirth. And the answer? Oh, I think so.

Merlin suffered from an uncertain sense of period, so that although I have no idea whether 5th-century Romano-British villas had fireplaces at the side wall, chairs with backs, and door furniture, or whether the children who lived in them had metal eyelets on the holes through which their clothes were laced, I nevertheless found my mind wandering to these irrelevant details throughout, because I wasn't convinced enough by the programme's aesthetic to give in to its probably superior knowledge, and anyway it still didn't look as convincing as Monty Python's Camelot.

The writing I found appallingly clumsy too, from the first "but how did it all begin, master" signalling the extended flashback from the end of the story to its beginning, to the diffusing of any sense of menace when Merlin is at risk of being sacrificed by playing his captor Vortigern as a sort of comic cockney turn.

However the zzzsap! effect is something that applies to actors as well as to special effects, the quality that painters try to picture in the halo. It isn't solely a matter of sex appeal, although that is part of it, but it is a question of charisma and star quality, the creation of the heroic. In the Mary Stewart novels on which *Merlin* is based it is clear that Ambrosius, Merlin's father, is stuffed to the gills with the zzzsap! effect, and the serial tried to convey that by casting Robert Powell in the part. Now Robert Powell at one time of course had zzzsap! oozing from every pore as, for example, when he climbed the waterfall in *Tommy* but more especially in *Jesus of Nazareth* when he aroused complicated emotions in a large percentage of the population by being as fanciable as hell in a role where you weren't allowed to fancy him: you can't fancy Jesus. Zeffereilli knew exactly what he was doing and I suspect Shaun Sutton, *Merlin*'s producer, was trying to do the same thing.

It doesn't, however, work. Powell is now too well known for being Robert Powell to be considered merely as an actor. He has for years been a star, and a star's performance is read not in what he does now on the screen but in what he has done in the past which he brings to the screen. Robert Redford and Paul Newman, for example, were perfectly right if, as legend has it, they refused to make a third buddy movie after *Butch Cassidy* and *The Sting* in which they played homosexuals because of course this would make you re-read the first two. When Arnie is asked to become a kindergarten teacher we

don't need to have seen the establishing shots of him as a tough cop first to assess his reaction: he is Arnie and we know how Arnie will react when the going gets tough.

Robert Powell is a star so his performance is an accretion of all his other performances unless he can hit the transcend button and make us focus on what he is doing now, and Powell for me never transcended the dull Richard Hannay and the dim detective he plays for Jasper Carrott.

George Winter as Merlin gave a performance which could be assessed on its own merits since, although some of us may remember Gervase from *The Knights of God* back in '87 this was hardly likely to be vivid enough to colour many readings of his performance. Astoundingly, they even managed to find a child actor, Thomas Lambert, who not only looked like him but could act a bit too. The whole point to the *Merlin* story as Stewart tells it, though, is Merlin's paternity and however much Lambert looked like Winter, Winter looked nothing like Powell so the striking resemblance between Merlin and his natural father was lost (and as for any resemblance between chunky Uther and his natural son Arthur, forget it). It's a bit tough to do a children's serial about bastard children searching for their fathers and keep on the right side of the Mary Whitehouse tendency. You wonder, in fact, why they bother.

The ITV zzzsap! factor came from *Time Riders*, a four-part serial also made for children and shown in October/November last year. Here the zzzsap! in the opening titles was to tell us that it was a science-fiction programme, the kaleidoscope effect pinched from the good Doctor was to tell us it was a time-travel science-fiction programme, and the first episode was a joy of compact plotting and character delineation at a simple but not childish level. It also had sufficient wit as well as respect for its audience to assume that they knew how to read film and would understand, for example, that when you fit a time-travel machine onto a motorbike it will, of course, produce a single track of flame behind it as it leaps back from the future.

It all went wrong after that.

The female 20th-century motorbike-riding scientist and her 19th-century boy thief companion leaped back in time to the 1640s and the English Civil War. I should declare an interest here: I love the English Civil War period, Prince Rupert and Cromwell fascinate me equally and you can keep the 1950s when I'm setting the buttons on my de Lorean.

So they get captured by the Roundheads who take them for Royalist spies and want to burn Miller as a witch. The



Kenneth Hall & Haydn Gwynne in 'Time Riders' (Thames TV)

second episode ended with Miller and Ben leaping off a castle into a river to escape the Roundheads but, yes, in episode three they get captured by the Royalists. No, not your average everyday Royalists. Homicidal maniacal Royalists who get their kicks out of dressing up as ghosts and axeing their visitors to death. They miss (Miller and Ben are hiding under the bed), the time travellers try to turn the tables on them but personally I would have thought dangling from a rope in your nightgown making *oooh hooo!* noises unlikely to impress homicidal maniacs in any event even if your pulley didn't get stuck and leave you dangling in a predicament at once dangerous and ludicrous. So then the homicidal maniacs set up the good old standby of a human hunt, tree Miller and Ben, lure them down and tie them to a tree for a firing squad...and then all drop dead when the Roundheads happen to be passing.

Isn't the English Civil War interesting enough? Isn't there enough passion and pain and death and drama in a real-life fight to the death between brother and brother all thinking they have right on their side? The comic villains in the 20th century managed to raise real issues about academic ethics, scientific integrity, the use of laboratory animals and the inadvisability of riding motor bikes through buildings without

losing pace or zzzsap! The comic villains in the 17th century sequences didn't tell us anything about, say, the use of accusations of witchcraft to erode the rights of women or the difference in organization between the Royalist and the New Model Armies but were just Random Nutters in Funny Frocks.

It's a shame. After episode one I thought Thames had pulled off an amazing coup and found a new *Dr Who* formula that would work even if the BBC decided not to revive the original. After episode four I thought I had better go and find a small ornament to break before I did my TV some permanent damage.

(Wendy Bradley)

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The Circle of Stones



Ugh! Sometimes it seems the Old Ones have nothing better to do than to count their heartbeats, and carve the number of sleeps they have onto the trunks of trees, so they can compute their stupid "yeers."

(What is a yeer anyway? Oh they are only too glad to tell you! There was once a faraway world which, unlike ours, went round and round a star. A yeer was the time it took to complete a circle. Don't ask me what that has got to do with anything!)

They count their heartbeats and their sleeps and they make little marks on the trees, and then they argue and bicker among themselves because Roop's weak and frantic heart beats faster than Gella's sluggish fat one, or because Mitch is so old that he sleeps and wakes out of step with everyone else, but still insists that his own sleeps are the true reckoning, because he is older than us all, and therefore closer to the Beginning.

Who cares? I go with my cousin Tema to the Big Pool, where the deep-lilies glow softly in the crystal water. And we dive for oysters together, Tema and I, seeing who can hold breath the longest down there in that mysterious forest among the deep-lilies and the rainbow fish and the tall-weed. And we burst to the surface, laughing and gasping at exactly the same moment under the wide roof of starry sky over the Pool. And hungrily seek each others lips, still gasping, still laughing, though the laughter fades away...

On the mossy bank under the lantern trees we tear open the oysters, which wheeze and fizz in their dying. We feed each other strips of the oozing flesh, and play-fight over the choicest ones, and steal the juices from one another's mouths and tongues. And she laughs huskily at my hard hunger, and I know that in a hundred heartbeats she will give to me at last her deepest secret, softer and deeper even than the pale fathom-oysters far down under the lilies...

But then we hear the horn blowing from the Circle of Stones: *Parp! Parp! Parp!*

The Old Ones have at last come to an agreement about their computations of the yeers. And they are calling us to the "Any Virsry," the Any Virsry of the Beginning.

Cursing, I come away from Tema and stand up, and my brain clouds up with red rage as I stare into the forest of lanterns, listening to the horn as it blows again, petulant and charmless, like the voice of an old man: *Parp! Parp! Parp!*

"I hate the Old Ones and all they stand for!" I snarl

Chris Beckett

to Tema, who is tying her skirt of tree-skin again around her waist.

But although I want to be a man, it seems I am still a child. I am still too afraid of my mother's anger to refuse to go – and of my grandmother's anger, and the anger of their men.

Tema spits sideways onto the ground and says nothing – I think my fear disappoints her – but she pulls off a stem from a sweet-bush to chew on to take away the oyster smell. Everyone knows why boys and girls dive for oysters, and cousins like Tema and me are not supposed to lie together. (Never mind that our precious forefather Tommee is supposed to have put seed into all his three daughters. Never mind that his grandson Herick is supposed to have lain with every one of his sisters and sister-cousins. That is different, apparently. That was the Beginning!)

Glowing, I lead the way back through the hot lantern trees, that warm our world with the heat they bring up from below, and light it with their luminous flowers. (A world that must spin round a star for its warmth and light: what kind of a half-made world is that? Like a cripple that can't hunt for his own meat! Our world is complete and self-sufficient.) Tema follows, slashing about her with a stick and humming a defiant tune.

The whole wood hums. Each tree gives off not only light but a faint rhythmic sound as it pumps cool water down into the hot rocks and brings hot water up. Bats and moths flutter and rustle around the shining flowers. Deep in the forest a star-bird calls: "Hoom! Hoom! Hoom!"

We could just walk away, I think to myself, We could just walk and walk into the forest and no-one would ever be able to find us.

About halfway to the Stone Circle, we run into a couple of others, my second cousin Gerrar, younger than me by a couple of womb-times, with his new hairs just beginning to grow, and his little brother Jerf, hobbling along on his little twisted feet.

"Stupid Any Virsries," says Gerrar trying to be big. "Who needs them anyway?"

I grew up alongside these two, whose mother is my own mother's cousin, and builds her shelter near ours. Gerrar admires me because I am older and cleverer and more daring than he is, and is always trying to emulate me and win my favour (just as his mother, with her ugly hare-lip, is always trying to emulate mine, who is a leader of the women and a favourite of the men).

Tema knocks a passing gold-bird from the air with a single expert slash of her stick, and we all run forward to stamp the last quivering life out of its body.

"Don't kill! Don't kill without need!" I quaver in a feeble voice, mimicking Mitch, the oldest of the Old Ones, and the others laugh. (Gold-birds are too bitter to eat and the Old Ones – and our mothers too – say it is wrong to kill except for food. But, of course, their disapproval is the reason why we like to do it.)

"Is that you Johar?" It is Redfox, my mother's newest man. "Your mother says you are to run to her shelter and put on your new kilt for the ceremony."

"Yes Redfox," I grumble, angry and ashamed, but too afraid of his fists and his sharp tongue to defy him. And I run off to my mother's shelter, feeling like a little scolded child, and raging inside against Red-

fox, and my mother, and my self.

"Remember!" It is old Mitch, with his white hair and straggly beard, standing in the middle of the Circle, with Gella and Roop on either side of him.

The rest of us aren't supposed to go inside the Stones, so we fill up the remaining space in the clearing between the Circle of Stones and the encircling trees, a great crowd of us – children, newhairs, mothers, grandmothers, men... Everyone is here, all the people of Eedan, all the people in the world.

"Remember!" creaks old Mitch again. (But like nearly a third of the assembled people, he has a hare-lip and can't properly pronounce his words. "Remember!" is what he really says in his reedy little voice, "Rememfer!" – and the spit flies out into the air.)

"One hundred and twenty yeers it is," says Gella in her wheezy heavy voice, "One hundred and twenty yeers by our special calculations, since our Tommee and our An-Gella came to Eedan..."

"In a boat they came," goes on Roop, when Mitch has nudged him irritably in the ribs, "in a wonderful boat that could be rowed between the stars. Something went wrong with the boat and they came to rest on Eedan."

"Perhaps the sky was leaking in!" I whisper to Tema – and she giggles. (What drivels they expect us to believe!) My grandmother glares at me across the Circle.

"Rememfer!" goes Mitch, "Rememfer!" – and he coughs juicily.

"In a round boat they came," says Gella, staring around with those anxious bulging eyes that make her look as if she has just swallowed a frog, "and this Circle marks the place where they came to land."

The three of them start to hobble painfully slowly around the Circle of white Stones, ritually brushing each one with a bundle of twigs. (They call this "keeping the memory alive.")

A little child wails. You can see that everyone is bored, even our grandmothers and their men, though they wear a mask of respect for the Old Ones over their features. Gerrar farts – and newhairs and children secretly laugh.

Round and round the fifteen Stones the Old Ones go, while we all stifle yawns, and Gerrar's fart wafts slowly through the clearing. (You can see the faces wrinkling up, one after another.)

The Old Ones return to the centre once again and Gella pokes Roop, who looks cross, but resumes the story.

"There were five people in the boat, and three of them tried to return in it to the world they came from. But the Three died. They drowned in the sky."

"Rememfer!" mumbles Mitch. A pair of lantern bats flitter across the clearing. The trees here have been pruned to make them grow more flowers and give off more light, and there are many flies and fleegs and flutterbyes among them for the bats to feed on.

Tema looks at the bats and licks her lips. She flexes her stick and gives me a little secret oyster-smile, which goes through me like a knife of pain and joy.

"But Tommee and An-Gella stayed in Eedan," says Mitch, "and they lay together and made three

daughters: Susa, Jene and Bernia."

"And when their new hairs grew and their blood began to flow," says Gella, "Tommee laid with his daughters, because there was no other man."

"Remember!"

"Remember that he only lay with them because there was no other man," says Gella sternly. "A man should not lie with his daughters, nor with his sisters, or even his first cousins," and for a moment she looks straight over at me and Tema.

How does she know? In spite of myself, I squirm. They have power over me, still, damn it, they have power. They can make me afraid, they can make me ashamed, however much I hate them for it.

"And Tommee said we must remember that a man should not lie with his daughters," says Roop, with his shifty watery eyes darting about, "nor yet his sisters, nor even his cousins, if there are others to lie with."

"And Susa gave birth to two daughters who lived: Kait and Rubi. And Jene gave birth to three daughters: Ali, Vere and Zena," says Mitch.

"And Bernia gave birth to two daughters, Lee and Kerra, and to Herick, who is called our Second Father," says Gella. "For, no less than Tommee, he is the father of us all."

I yawn, and Gerrar yawns in imitation of me.

"And Herick lay with his sisters and his sister-cousins," says old Mitch, "and the children of those unions were Jannard and Mairi and...and..."

A look of panic comes over that wrinkled old hare-lipped face...He has forgotten! The chain that holds his precious years together is broken! The whole world is crumbling.

And then he smiles. Of course, of course.

"The children of those unions were Jannard and Mairi and Mitch..."

The older people laugh affectionately with him. The child he had forgotten was *himself*. My mother laughs, and then glances at me and makes a cross face because I am not even bothering to smile.

So I laugh. But I laugh harshly – a laugh at, not a laugh with. And Gerrar and Tema do the same.

Unexpectedly old Mitch notices the mocking bark of us newhairs and turns upon us, his eyes wide with his distress. Never before have the Old Ones departed from their rote at an Any Virsry, but he does now, and Gella and Roop stare at him in amazement.

"You mock, newhairs, you mock our memories. But think of this! I am a great-grandfather to you, and though I am old I stand before you now. I am real whether you like it or not. And when I was young like you, I had a great-grandfather, and he was old too, but I saw him, just as you see me. And my great-grandfather was Tommee. I saw him, I touched his skin, and he came from another world beyond the stars!"

Tears of frustration and grief and helplessness are running down his face. He knows that it is up to us whether we keep his stories alive or let them die.

"I saw and touched Tommee," old Mitch almost sobs, "Think of that before you laugh, newhairs! Think of that!"

He is a frail old man, who will soon die. (They say he is a hundred womb-times old, though he measures his own age only in years). His distress is so palpable

that I have to look away in shame, though I hate myself for my weakness in doing so. Some of the younger ones around me weep with remorse.

Gella takes up the genealogy: "The children of those unions were Jannard and Mairi and Mitch and Roop and Lu and Gella and..."

On and on they go through the generations. And when at last they have finished that, they begin the "remembering of things," the long list of "Remember this and remember that," which Father Herick is supposed to have begun: how that stupid imaginary world which no-one has ever seen spins round and round like a wooden top so half of it is all lighted up by the star and half of it is dark – not constant like our world; how the people there had wondrous powers, now lost to us; how they could store up words by making little marks; how they found hard stuff in the ground that they released by fire, and used to make knives and tools; how they found a thing called the Single Force, that could carry them between the stars...

"And they found another kind of force that could be made to flow along strings, and could be used for light and heat and even for machines that could think. It was called *Li*..." Roop stumbles uncertainly on the word, "It was called *Lick*...*Licktrickity*..."

("Li...Lick...Licktrickity..." Gerrar mimics under his breath, and there are giggles around him.)

Who needs licktrickity in our Eedan, who gives us all the heat and light we need?

"Remember!" goes old Mitch. "Our father Herick commanded us to remember, for one day we will find these things again, if we only remember they are possible."

And then, while the children grow hungry and start to grizzle and cry, the Old Ones recite the Laws.

It goes on and on, for a whole waking and longer it seems to me, and afterwards everyone is tired. The three Old Ones especially are tired, after all that standing and remembering and talking, and all that unspoken resistance and incredulity to struggle against. They look like empty husks, pale and tottering. They are pitiable and contemptible and admirable all at once. (I can hardly bear the conflict of my feelings). Their children and grandchildren come forward to help them. My own mother offers old great-aunt Gella her arm, to lead her to her shelter, where she can eat a little food and rest.

The clearing quickly empties. Everyone is anxious to eat or to sleep, or simply to get away from that restricted space in the clearing between the trees and the Circle of Stones – and some have half a waking or more of travelling to do before they get back to their own shelters (there are even those who live as far away as the Hill Where The Lanterns Are Blue). But I whisper to Tema and to Gerrar to stay behind and wait till we are on our own. An idea has come to me, an appalling idea, a terrifying idea – an idea to redeem myself, to free myself and make me at last into a man.

So they wait, Tema swiping up at the bats and gold birds as they dive too and fro over our heads, Gerrar squatting proudly at my feet, with his little brother Jerf beside him, stretching out those aching twisted feet. (The Old Ones call them "Tommee's Curse," those feet and the hare-lips. They say it is a punish-

ment on us all for Tommee lying with his own close kin. It is the sort of rubbish they do talk. They never say who the punishment is from!)

"Now listen carefully," I tell them, when finally we are alone. "What I am going to say must be a secret between us and us alone. Is that agreed?"

Gerrar nods enthusiastically. (That boy would follow me to the Faraway Hills if I asked him, to the Faraway Hills and beyond.)

Tema crushes the head of a fallen lantern bat between her finger and thumb, and nods too, though with a questioning eyebrow raised. She has been disappointed with me once this waking, and she expects to be disappointed again.

Jerf looks up at me with his wide eyes and says, "Yes, I promise."

"You'd better, Jerf, or if you can't you'd better go right now. This is serious, not a silly children's game."

Gerrar grabs his brother's arm and twists it menacingly to reinforce my words.

"Promise on your life, Jerf, or go."

"I promise," says Jerf, wincing.

So then I tell them.

"Listen. We will finish the Any Virsries for ever! We will destroy the Circle of Stones!"

Their eyes grow wide and Tema lets out a low whistle of mingled shock and admiration. This is more serious than she had thought. This is very bold indeed.

But little Jerf's eyes suddenly fill with tears. "But we can't do that! What about the Old Ones? They love these stones. Poor old Mitch would die if he came here and the Stones had gone!"

"Good!" I hiss, banishing all the weak feelings of shame and pity and loss that well up in my own heart. Banishing them like the soft faces of lantern bats, that look up at us so appealingly before we crush them in our hands.

And then Tema – slender and dangerous as a tree leopard – grabs the little boy by the hair, and tips his head back and runs the tip of her finger across his throat. (How I want her, how I hunger for her!)

"Listen, Jerf," she hisses at him. "You promised Johar you would keep this secret and I'll tell you what I'll do if you break that promise. I'll take the shell of a fathom oyster and break it, and sharpen the jagged edge up on a stone. And then I'll pull your head back like this and slice open these two arteries in your little neck so all your blood comes spurting out like the sap out of a lantern tree. And then I'll slice open this little tube that you breathe through, and I'll go on slicing until I reach the bone. Oh what a lot of blood I'll spill and you'll be dead, dead, dead! Is that understood?"

Jerf nods and fingers his neck, with the tears running down his face, looking round for his big brother. But Gerrar, torn in his loyalties but subservient to me, has turned away guiltily to avoid meeting Jerf's eyes.

Then Tema strides over to the Circle of Stones and picks up two of them, one in each hand. I do the same, half expecting them to turn to fire and burn me, or perhaps to come alive and scream aloud for help. But of course they are just ordinary white stones. Gerrar follows me and picks up another two. He smiles across at me mirthlessly, his face very pale with fear and guilt. And finally little Jerf, still crying, picks up

a single stone (two would be too heavy for him) and hobbles after us to the stream that flows along the edge of the clearing on its way to the Deep Pool.

They fall with a satisfying plop! into the clear water and sink down between the luminous yellow flowers of the waving-weed, to settle among the many identical white pebbles that form the bottom of the stream.

"Johar, won't they just get more stones and make a new circle?" Gerrar asks. (I think he is half-hoping that they will, and that our crime will be undone. Half of me knows exactly how he feels.)

"Probably," I say, "but the Old Ones think these stones were laid there by Tommee and An-gella themselves. A new Circle will never be the same."



And we go back for the remaining Stones.

"Hoom! Hoom! Hoom!" goes a star bird in a tree beside the Deep Pool, rustling her long tail studded with luminous stars. She tips her head on one side and regards us for a moment with her enormous compound eyes.

"Hoom! Hoom! Hoom!" she goes.

"Aaah! Aaah! Aaah!" comes the faint answer from a male somewhere in the lantern forest.

Who knows where the forest ends?

The female star bird clatters off across the Pool, spreading tiny ripples over the stars of the Pentagram reflected in its smooth surface.

The forest hums.

"We will be the new father and the new mother of Eedan," I tell Tema, in the quietness beside the pool.

She laughs.

"No, I mean it," I insist. "You and I are the best of our generation. We are cleverer and more beautiful than anyone else. Everyone knows it. That's why kids like Gerrar follow us around. We're clever and we dare. One day we will rule this whole world."

"You're crazy Johar, you really are."

But she smiles across at me, showing her teeth and the pink tip of her tongue. I roll across to her and press my mouth to hers, cupping my hands over the buds of her breasts and feeling them harden under my palms.

"What will we do?" she asks with a little breathless laugh. "What will we do when we have all this power?"

"We will tell new stories for the people to hand

down," I tell her, "stories about Eedan, not about some stupid imaginary spinning-top world, not about boats that can sail between the stars."

I start to feed at her mouth again, but she wriggles free from me and gets up.

"Let's dive for some oysters," she says. "I bet I get the most."

I race after her and catch beside the water's edge. Oh, how her body melts against mine! How her tongue slides quickly between our joined lips!

"But what will we do when we are the Old Ones?" she says at last, when we pause to take a breath. "What happens when the young ones try to throw away our stories?"

"Just let them try!"

Laughing, she dives into the crystal water. And I follow after, down into the dim light and the strange reefs and the luminous weeds that are like a second lantern forest. The deep-lilies shine far below and the fathom oysters open and close their soft pink mouths in the deepest places of all.

And this time, no Old One's feeble horn is ever going to call us back.

Chris Beckett wrote "The Long Journey of Frozen Heart" (Interzone 49), which was well liked by a number of our readers – see, for example, Robert Caldwell's letter in issue 53.

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Destroy All Brains!

Paul Di Filippo

I first heard of the movie *Destroy All Brains!* from my friend Bruce.

He phoned me at three in the morning. I wasn't sleeping, so I answered on the first half a ring.

Without preamble, he spewed out a torrent of Texas jive.

"Man, I just seen the best goddamn movie! *Destroy All Brains!* Real cheesy technicolor, buncha half-familiar character actors from 'Sixties sitcoms, script by that guy who used to write for *Ramparts* – you know, he killed himself in 'Seventy-two – and the plot!"

Here Bruce paused. I prompted him. "The plot?"

I could hear Bruce scratching his stubble over the long-distance line. His voice was petulantly doubtful when it returned, like that of a man who had misplaced his car keys, and was, moreover, unsure of the location of the car itself.

"The plot – well, yeah, man, there was a plot, sure there was. I just can't put it into words. Something sorta James-Bondish, about a scheme to take over the world by a cabal of Secret Masters employing insidious, diabolical Red Chinese psychopharmaceutical mesmerization techniques." His voice gained a little conviction. "But it was really, really well-done. Sincerely twisted, you dig? High-brow trash. Catch it if you can. Later, man!"

Bruce is a software engineer. He works at home and keeps odd hours. A cable-ready Watchman rests atop his monitor, placed so he can scan it from time to time while he hacks. No wonder he hadn't been able to tell me the plot.

I got up from my seat in front of the softly glowing tube and went to a shelf of reference books. I review "media" for my local newspaper. I had been watching bad movies since age five, and thought I had heard of all of them. The title Bruce had mentioned didn't ring any bells.

I checked *Psychotronic Films: Destroy All Brains!* was not mentioned. I looked in the *Re/Search Incredibly Strange Films* issue. Nothing. I thumbed through Halliwell and Katz. Zip. Likewise for the Maltin, Martin and Ebert guides.

I tried to call Bruce back, to make sure I had heard the title correctly.

His line was busy. I figured he had his modem plugged in. I went to bed.

Two days later I got a postcard from Bruce. The card depicted a water-buffalo in a rice-paddy. It was postmarked SOMEWHERE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. This is what it said:

Yo – Gone to live in Burma. Got a job building a

database for drug warlords. Send all correspondence via diplomatic pouch.

The next time I heard about *Destroy All Brains!* was from my buddy Rudy.

Rudy was a professor in California. He taught semiotics and pop culture. His best and most popular course was entitled "The Myth of Single-valued Narratives in the Work of Ernie Bushmiller." I had a text I wanted him to deconstruct.

When he was done with that simple chore, he said, "You ever heard of a movie called '*Destroy All Brains!*'?"

"Once."

"Well, you should track it down. It's a rather disturbing little gem. I didn't spot the copyright in the credits, but I'd peg it around 'Thirty-eight. Probably from one of the independent studios, like Republic. Black and white, of course. From the sloppy editing, I'd guess it might even have been originally issued as a serial. Anyway, the director was one of those half-forgotten guys. Not Lewton or Browning, somebody even more obscure. The cast was anonymous – though I thought I saw Einstein in a crowd scene."

"The physicist?"

"No, the rabbi! Of course, the physicist. But forget that. They could've been using stock newsreel footage to save money. No, the important thing was the plot –"

"The plot."

"Yeah. It's kinda hard to summarize. It was mostly about a cult of voodoo-crazed Louisiana Negroes trying to enslave America's political leaders by obeah rites. I could swear one of the scenes of them worshipping featured full-frontal nudity. During the big dance around the fire. Is that possible?"

"Pre-Code," I said. "Maybe. Especially if it was done *National-Geographic*-style."

Rudy sounded worried. "If you ever see it, I'd appreciate your thoughts on its relevance."

Kinda weird phraseology, I thought.

The next day I was in my office at work when the bulletin came in. Rudy had taken out the Governor of California with a radio-controlled model airplane packed with Czech plastic explosives. The Lifestyles Commissioner had been a collateral fatality. Rudy had escaped the scene of the carnage disguised as the Ambassador from Burkina Faso.

When I met Marc on the sidewalk a few days later, I told him all about Rudy and Bruce.

"Far out, man. I seen that movie too. Just the other night, in fact. But nothing bad's happened

to me so far."

"How could you tell?" I asked.

"Funny, man, muy jubiloso."

Marc lived in a squat, an abandoned building that used to be a coathanger factory. His clothing was assembled from items refused by the Salvation Army. He was always hungry. He had been a famous criminal lawyer until he had gotten unprofessionally involved with the murderous widow of a perfume magnate. Falling in love with her white shoulders, he let her become his obsession, his opium. But she turned out to be poison in the end. His current roommates were a tribe of Puerto Rican separatists who were sending most of the money they made by selling mimeographed Romanian pornography back to their colonized island, while using the rest to amass sophisticated weaponry. They had tapped into a nearby power line and stolen a television from a local bar named The Three-Pound Sponge.

"You saw *Destroy All Brains!* over the air?"

"Yup. Channel Sixty-eight last Wednesday, after midnight."

"I checked the Guide that day. It wasn't mentioned."

"Last minute substitution."

"What was it about?"

"It was this totally 'Fifties sci-fi thing. Alien invasion of Earth. The hero was Ward Cleaver, or someone who looked just like him. The aliens were naturally formed just like Tee-Vees! Big clunky console models with those old-fashioned separate rabbit-ears with felt pads on their bottoms. State of the art for the time, I guess. It was great the way they made the legs move. And their saucer – ! Anyway, I don't remember much more than that. I'm not even sure how it ended."

"Colour, or black and white?"

"I can't be sure. The colour's not working on our set."

"Here's a twenty, Marc. Take it easy."

"Dope."

"Don't spend it that way, Marc."

"No, I just meant, 'cool.'"

"Oh."

The lead story on the six o'clock news was all about Marc. He had apparently used my twenty to purchase illegally a clip of ammo for one of the automatic weapons the Puerto Ricans were stockpiling, whereupon he had gone down to our town's old-line department store – where all the clerks were twenty-years-of-service lady veterans with clip-on earrings – and sprayed a six-by-fifteen-foot display of televisions. No one was hurt except a State Senator browsing among the nearby CD's – when they wheeled him out on a stretcher, I could see he was still clutching *Destroy All Brains!* – The Soundtrack; but when I went down to the store for it, they told me there was no such title in inventory – who was gashed by flying phosphor-coated glass.

I felt Rudy would have been pleased by the lucky accident of such a political victim.

I called up Channel Sixty-eight: they claimed not to own a copy of *Destroy All Brains!*

For the next two weeks, I checked TV Guide religiously. But *Destroy All Brains!* was not slated to appear. I figured that, having played here recently,

it would not show up in my market anytime soon again, but should surface elsewhere in the country.

Liz woke me at noon one day with a call from Chicago. She works for an ad agency there.

"I know how you're always searching for a good column topic. You should try to rent this movie I saw last night. It's called –"

"*Destroy All Brains!*..."

"Right! You've seen it already?"

"No. But it seems like everyone else I know has."

"They must've told you then how it's above-average for a made-for-tee-vee flick."

"Made for tee-vee?"

"Sure. Mid-'Seventies, I'd guess. I think it was by Aaron Spelling, but I could be wrong. Anyhow, it starred what's-his-name, the pop star who was on a soap-opera. Or was it a western? And that kid actress, the one who later got into porn films. They were recruited by the government and sent as special agents to break the Arab oil embargo."

"Which one?"

"The first. I think. But the interesting part came when they met Lawrence of Arabia and Richard Burton."

"Taylor's Burton?"

"No, the one who discovered the Nile. The two Englishmen were still alive and like the immortal masterminds behind everything that happened in the Mideast. After that, it gets a little hard to explain."

"I can imagine."

"Well, I gotta run."

"Liz –"

"Yes?"

"Nothing. Just take care of yourself."

"Sure."

When Liz married the King of Jordan – whose wife had recently died in a joint Israeli-PLO terrorist attack, while she was consecrating a McDonald's – I wasn't surprised.

After that, I read about a frat party during Spring Weekend that turned into a six-day riot with hundreds of casualties and millions of dollars worth of property damage. The expendable last paragraph of the article mentioned that the night's entertainment, screened just before the riot, had been a showing of "an old eight-millimeter stag film about gang-bangs called '*Destroy All Trains!*'"

Sic.

I found a film catalogue that listed, among its educational offerings:

DESTROY ALL BRAINS!: B&W, 40 min. 1948. Department of Agriculture feature about dangers of mad-cow disease. Mature Audiences only.

Joe-Bob Briggs saw *Destroy All Brains!* at a drive-in that summer and reported on it in print, describing it as "the first gore 'n' garters intergalactic thriller of the 'Nineties!" Later that same month, he was filmed by camera-crews while disappearing through the gates of a Zen Buddhist monastery in Kuala Lumpur, his head shaven, begging bowl in hand.

When the tenth friend called me up to tell me about *Destroy All Brains!* I quit answering the phone. I figured I'd read about them one place or another anyway, or catch them on the late news.

I kept waiting for *Destroy All Brains!* to show up on a local station, or appear in my neighbourhood video rental store. When it didn't immediately manifest itself in the next few months, I reminded myself that this was a big country.

One day recently at work, when I wasn't particularly thinking about the film, I got a small package delivered to my desk. I opened it up.

Inside was a toy: a red plastic case with an eyehole fitted with a plastic lens, and a slide-switch. I cracked the case at its seam. Inside was a single AA battery, a flashlight bulb, a small electric motor, a tiny spool of film and its takeup reel.

I closed the case. I took it home.

Private showing.

Paul Di Filippo made his *Interzone* debut in our last issue, with "World Wars III." As we noted then, he has contributed a good deal to *F&SF* and other American magazines. In Britain, his stories have appeared in David Garnett's *Orbit SF Yearbook* anthologies and in the first issue of Garnett and Moorcock's revived *New Worlds*.

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- #14, Winter 85/86: Clive Barker (Kim Newman)
- #15, Spring 1986: Bruce Sterling (D. Pringle & A. Robertson)
- #16, Summer 1986: John Banks (Kim Newman)
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- #50, August 1991: Rachel Pollack (Colin Greenland)
- #51, September 1991: Stephen Baxter (Colin Munro)
- #51, September 1991: Terry Pratchett (Brندان Wignall)
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- #55, January 1992: Christopher Fowler (Dave Hughes)
- #56, February 1992: Lawrence Sanders (Andrew Tidmarsh)
- #56, February 1992: Tom Hall (Brندان Wignall)

See note on page 70 of this magazine as to availability of back issues.

Ye Gods!

Brendan Wignall talks to Tom Holt

It really is a puzzle why Tom Holt is not as famous as the writer with whom he now shares a cover artist (Josh Kirby), Terry Pratchett. Perhaps cover art suggests part of the problem; when Holt first began writing his original humorous novels – as opposed to his first two which were sequels to E.F. Benson's "Mapp and Lucia" stories – they presented a categorization problem for his publishers, Macmillan. At that time they had not heard of Terry Pratchett, with whom Holt shares certain features, and so they decided to jacket his books in the style of Paul Simple, the artist responsible for the covers of Tom Sharpe's books. Unfortunately the only thing which Holt has in common with Sharpe is his ability to make us laugh; in terms of style and content they are totally different writers. Holt can't have helped matters from a marketing point of view when, after only two novels in the humorous fantasy vein, he deviated into two historical novels – outstandingly good, but difficult to categorize and, therefore, to market. It is only with the change to his new publishers, Orbit, that the marketing strategy looks as though it might generate the sales and interest which he deserves.

Tom Holt's first foray into print was at the age of 13 with *Poems by Tom Holt*. Now out of print, it would be interesting to see whether the poems show any of the humour which so distinguishes his novels, the first of which was published at the ripe old age of 22.

"You know how it is with children who are too small or too fat to join the fights in the playground: their mothers decide that they are artistic and sensitive and all that sort of thing. I was extremely fat when I was 11 or 12 – and unsociable – so it was pretty obvious that I was artistic and sensitive and all that sort of thing.

"As children do at that age, I wrote poetry. My mother decided these were good poems so she collected them together, typed them out and sent them off to various publishers, one of whom decided they were very good. I know the odds against unsolicited material getting published first time out of the barrel are extremely high, but that's what happened, and I was published at an early age. I had a brief storm of celebrity: I was on TV and in the papers

for a while simply because of the child prodigy angle, which I guess did some very weird things to my personality at that age which I could probably have done without.

"I carried on writing poetry in a desultory fashion until about the age of 15. Then my mother got a job reviewing in *Stage and Television Today*, doing TV reviews. She suggested to the editor – forcefully – that 'gosh, my son is a very good writer; he's only 15, but he'll do some reviews for you.' So lo and behold, I was asked to start writing television reviews at that early age. I reviewed the first ever episode of *Rising Damp*: I thought it was no good at all, which shows how much I know. I did that for a bit until there were NUJ problems, I think

"I'd given up thinking of myself as a writer by that stage, I had other things on my mind. But my mother – she's a recurring theme throughout the early part of my story – introduced me to E.F. Benson's *Lucia* books, which had a deserved loyal following – although they weren't fashionable at that stage because the television series hadn't been made and they were not very widely known. She and some friends of hers, who were also aficionados, were always saying what a shame it was that the series had finished just on the point of the Second World War breaking out and wouldn't it be nice to find out what happened to all these characters during the War. Entirely for my own and their benefit I sat down and wrote my first novel, which was a sequel. It was dead easy to do, because I didn't have to think of the characters and the plot more or less formed itself; all I had to do was the style I've always been able to do pastiche: in fact, it's a problem with me. One of the reasons why I don't read many books is that if I read a book with a strong style in it, then either consciously or unconsciously, I adopt the style. Anyway, I wrote the first half of a *Lucia* book. Now, my mother was a great friend of the novelist Barbara Pym; she'd recently died and my mother was appointed her literary executor, and so came into contact with her publishers. And one of the first things she said to them was 'by the way, my son also writes; you will wish to have a look at his first novel.' They did, and by my

second 10,000-to-one chance it was put in front of someone who liked it and wanted to publish it. Well, the first half of the book had taken me something like nine months to write, and the second half took me about three weeks."

"After *Lucia in Wartime* (1985) I immediately wrote a second sequel which was marginally better than the first (*Lucia Triumphant*, 1986), but I reckoned there was no real future in doing this sort of thing, and what I wanted to do was to write something of my own. At that time I couldn't think of anything which the sort of thing I wanted to write was comparable to; my own reading in the area was very circumscribed; when *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* first came out on the radio I listened to that like everyone else – it was totally new. I thought it was extremely funny and it was written in a style that appealed to me; the sort of comic writing I was reading at the time was from people like Alan Coren, who are stylists. I wanted to write something in that style, but I didn't want to ape anyone

so science fiction was out, so I thought how would it be if I did something with mythology? I had the idea of the ultimate wish-fulfilment, which would be having one of these magical items – the bits of magical equipment, the stage props which heroes have but having it in the 1980s; and it would be especially useful if it were to come to a small inoffensive bloke like me who would have more use for it than one of these large muscular heroes, who could probably do what he wanted anyway. I thought this was quite a nice idea for a story, and I wrote my first book – the first of my own novels – using that idea.

"When I delivered it to my publishers, they said to me, 'what's this supposed to be?' So I said it was a comedy, and they said, 'yes, but it's peculiar; what niche does it fit in?' Well I had no idea what niche it fit into; this was back in 1985, and I certainly hadn't heard of Terry Pratchett in those days, so I think I can honestly say that I had the idea for humorous fantasy at about the same time as he did, and independently. Anyway, the thing got published and no one knew how to market it; it didn't do very well in hardback in this country,

although it did a lot better in America. I think that one of the reasons for its relative lack of success is that no one thought of it as being part of the fantasy genre. My paperback publishers decided to put 'Fantasy/Science Fiction' on the back cover and that editorial-cum-marketing decision changed the way I thought about myself, because I suddenly thought, 'yes that's what I do: I write comic fantasy; that's nice to know.' Once I realized I was doing that, everything seemed to fall into place, and that's what I've been doing pretty much ever since."

He's already mentioned Terry Pratchett, and both writers have similar comic styles; his new publishers seem intent on encouraging the association with the Josh Kirby jacket for his latest novel, *Flying Dutch* (1991). How does he feel about this comparison?

"The first Terry Pratchett book I read was *Guards! Guards!*, which came out a couple of years ago, and I was profoundly aggravated to find that he seemed to be doing exactly the sort of things which either I was doing or that I wished I could do if only I had the skill. He's lucky in that he has hit on a continuous setting which can go on for ever and ever; I haven't done that, in fact I'm afraid of doing that, because I don't want to appear imitative in any way. So I have to keep thinking of a different situation each time, which can be very tiresome; how I'm going to keep this up for the next thirty years I do not know."

One thing Tom Holt has in common with Pratchett is what might be called a "sunniness of disposition"; the writing is informed by a generosity of spirit not often found in the field of humorous fiction and they are capable of being thought-provoking without being vicious.

"When one is writing fantasy about a world which is to all intents and purposes totally imaginary, I don't see the point of getting all vitriolic and savage about people that don't exist. There are a lot of 'types' in the world who anger me to the point of wishing to wreak violence, but I don't choose to write about them: they're not conducive to a humorous a treatment — at least, not from me. The things that I feel strong irritation about and that I want to write about are things that are intrinsically funny as well. There are certain things which are funny; socks, for example are intrinsically funny. Another thing that is intrinsically funny is money. If you can attribute financial motives to anything it automatically makes it funny. The great big untapped resource of humour, which I'm going to do my best to tap if I can, is attributing to great events in history, or legendary history, a financial motive. I do it to a certain extent in my most recent published novel, *Flying Dutch*, with insurance people.



"You have to laugh at the whole thing about money, and investment, and financial services, otherwise they're just incredibly sordid and depressing: you have to laugh at that sort of thing; otherwise it just gets to you and you feel sick. Financial services and the like are one of the few things which make me angry, so instead of writing viciously about them I just write about them in a fairly realistic way. My financial characters are pretty realistic, and certainly the schemes they think up are exaggerations but they're naturalistic: I just let the audience come to their own conclusions. With my sort of comedy the narrator doesn't make value-judgements, he leaves that to the audience.

"However, speaking of writing vitriolically, I started — in fact I started and completed — a book like that which had some of the best comic writing I had ever done in it. It is a book about a solicitor in a country practice [Holt's own situation] — it is very close to being autobiographical — and parts of it are very very funny. When my agent read it, he said, 'You can't do this Tom: it's so full of hatred. There are times when you go from being funny to just being sheer frothing at the mouth, and you haven't noticed.' I took that as a warning to stay out of that area; I thought I was being funny and I wasn't, all I was being was rabid."

The book which launched Holt onto the path of humorous fantasy was *Expecting Someone Taller* (1987), a comic continuation of Wagner's Ring cycle. Malcolm Fisher, a mild and unassuming Englishman, gains possession of the Tarnhelm, a helmet which enables him to change shape and understand the speech of birds; in addition to the Tarnhelm he also has a ring that provides him with as much gold as he wishes and makes him ruler of the world.

Expecting Someone Taller was Holt's first foray into Wagnerian territory, but it was not his last; his most recent novel, *Flying Dutch*, takes on another of his operas. It seems strange to find a humorous writer and Richard Wagner sharing the same material.

"That's not intentional; I guess a good explanation is that we choose the same themes. Things appeal to Wagner because they're full of brooding significance and power, and majesty and all the rest of it; they appeal to me because I look at them and see the comic potential there. There is something inherently ludicrous about the situation which you get in the Ring cycle, and I think that in all the great situations you can either write a comedy or a tragedy about them. It's very easy to parody or send up the situations of great tragedies like *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, for example, because the atmosphere is so

tensed-up and heightened; if you do that same heightening and tensing-up and then you say something funny, it's even funnier.

"If you think of the story of the Flying Dutchman there are so many ramifications going through it; I've just chosen to treat them in the comic key rather than the tragic key. I'm not writing books for Wagnerians; Wagner and I have the same things which appeal to us, but we react to them in different ways."

Holt's other published humorous fantasy is based on myth, although the provenance of *Who's Afraid of Beowulf?* (1988) is older than that of his Wagner-inspired novels. Does he intend to continue mining mythology for its comic potential?

"The one following *Flying Dutch* is a fantasy using the Roman pantheon as my mythological background rather than the usual favourites of most fantasy writers, the Norse gods and the Celtic gods. The Roman pantheon is not an area of mythology which usually appeals much to fantasy writers; I think that's simply because the Northern gods are much more macho and look better dressed from head to foot in black leather. The classicals are all a load of bloody intellectuals, and aren't into that sort of thing. There aren't any intellectuals in Northern mythology. The interesting thing about Wagner's treatment of it is that he puts an intellectual in *Das Rheingold*, and the intellectual is doing what my characters do. He looks at all these people and he thinks, 'My god. What a lot of poncing about. What's that bloke carrying a great big spear about for?' and 'What a really awful mess they've made of everything.' The intellectual doesn't appear in the later parts of the Ring cycle. I don't know whether Wagner couldn't keep it up any longer, or whether he didn't feel the need, having made the point. That is what the Northern mythologies lack: intellectuals. That's what I like to put in my books, to look at them; or I like to make them intellectuals who are stuck with this particular role they have to play, but are conscious of it. My go at playing with Odin in *Expecting Someone Taller* is to make him painfully aware of his own situation, but unable to do anything about it: if you're the Great Sky-Father you've just got to buckle down and get on with it."

"I took a slight detour from the course of humorous fantasy a few years ago because I wanted to write an historical novel. When I was at Oxford I read Classics and Ancient History, and after I'd finished my degree course I had the idea that I wanted to go on and do post-graduate work – probably because it was a bit cold and miserable out in the real world and it would be nice to stay in and continue to use the

free bar-billiards machine and things like that. I started doing research into fifth-century Athens; I had a theory, which if it turned out to be correct was going to revolutionize everyone's perceptions of the period. About three or four years later I realized that my theory was in fact incorrect, and as a thesis was going to be very short: economic conditions and in particular food supply was not a fundamental factor in the evolution of the Athenian democracy.

"So I left Oxford rather shamefacedly, but I had all this stuff in the back of my mind. I'd got to the stage which I think it's important that you reach if you're going to write convincing historical novels, when you don't have to think what people in the period say or do, you just know. If someone were to ask me what a fifth-century Athenian was likely to be wearing on his feet under any given circumstances I could tell them: I know that, I don't have to look it up."

The novel which came out of Holt's abandoned thesis was *Goatsong* (1989) which was followed by *The Walled Orchard* (1990). Together they form the autobiography of Eupolis of Athens, a writer of comedies who lives at the time of the Peloponnesian War. These novels debate the nature of democracy, assert the importance of Comedy, and chart the end of the Athenian dream. They are certainly amongst the best historical novels I have ever read.

"*Goatsong* was very easy to write. It was lovely because the period is remote enough for pretty much everything to be strange and different, but while the things might be different, the people are the same. A thing which always irritates me about historical novels, even when you've got 'proper' writers writing them, is that they forget that people in history talked the same as we do; they chatted, they conversed, they used colloquial language; they didn't speak in a grand and awkward manner. Even writers like Gore Vidal forget this: they have people saying significant things all the time. When you have someone standing in the marketplace listening to Demosthenes speaking, I'm sure the thing that he is aware of is not the fact that Demosthenes is speaking, but that somebody next to him is standing on his foot. That is what I've looked for in historical novels and never found: somebody who writes about history as if writing about the present.

"If one writes in the first person, the first-person narrator doesn't realize that the people he is talking to are finding many of his concepts strange. He talks about them because they're familiar to him and one has to be a bit careful to make sure that the reader can pick these things up from context. If you don't explain, if you leave it to the

reader to work out what's going on, how this entirely different world works, I think it's so much better that way; it is so much more convincing. I think the best historical novels are all Robert Graves', and when he writes in the first person he does this, he never explains. His best novel is *Count Belisarius* which is set in a period I knew nothing about when I opened the book, and in the first couple of chapters there's a totally uncompromising launch into a culture which is halfway between the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages. He doesn't explain a single thing, but by the time I'd read two or three chapters I felt, rightly or wrongly, that I knew all about that period and that I could understand that culture. That's the sort of thing I wanted to do with *Goatsong*, albeit with a rather more familiar period, but trying to look at it from a different period. The thing people rarely realize about Classical Greece, when they think about it as a landscape covered with fallen-down but extremely beautiful marble columns is that it was a society with virtually no material possessions. Everybody was involved with agriculture to a greater or lesser degree, it was a peasant society, and because there were no material possessions there was nothing to do in the evening but to talk. Which is why you have on one hand a really basic society, and on the other hand you have a development of the intellect which is unparalleled when you consider what they achieved from virtually no background or roots at all.

"That period was nice to write about. I don't think I'll do it again, but I'm glad to have got it out of my system. I'm far prouder of that novel, as a book, than I am of anything else; it was two books with one central character – about 700 pages in total – all in the first person, and it was a pretty intensive study of a pretty complicated character, so it's the most ambitious thing I've ever done from a literary point of view. I think it's also the funniest book I've ever written: I can't write seriously; I've tried and I can't do it. The only way I can be serious is by writing black comedy rather than white comedy. I think black comedy is far more tragic and depressing and serious than 'serious' writing, simply because it's the negative image of comedy and brings things home that much more."

Another deviation from the path of humorous fantasy came when he collaborated with Steve Nallon, on *I, Margaret*.

"The idea was that it was the autobiography that Margaret Thatcher should have written. I'm not particularly a politically-minded person; Steve Nallon, who did the Margaret Thatcher voice on *Spitting Image*, had the idea of writing the book. He's

studied the character of Margaret Thatcher very seriously and given it a great deal of thought and analysis; not just in a superficial custard-pie slinging way, but actually trying to work out an alternative explanation for what makes this person tick apart from the obvious one, the serious one if you like. We tried to work out a comic explanation for how she ticks, which would accord with all the known facts, and write her autobiography from that point of view. We tried to see her as this very naive, basically well-intentioned person, very firmly based in her common-sense Grantham childhood. We followed her through her life as she pursued what she saw as her obvious destiny.

"Steve was not used to writing concerted prose, so he wanted someone to help; I was called in as 'a stylist,' someone who could do the writing. We got along very well together: he did the dialogue and the settings, and most of the jokes were his, but the narrative and the way it was structured and put together was mine. We worked together on the characterization of the people involved, and it was a very funny book. However, unfortunately it fell among libel lawyers who said, 'you really can't say this, you know,' and 'you especially can't say this,' and 'no way can you say that about Dennis Thatcher!'" So we had to change the character; we had a lovely character for Dennis Thatcher before that, he made such perfect sense with the rest of it, but we weren't allowed to get away with it and had to turn him instead into a buffoon. We did that, but it threw out the whole timing of the thing, and as a result I don't think the book is very funny: it's got some good jokes in it but it doesn't hold together; it lacks an internal force of its own which would make sense of it – it's just a collection of jokes about 1980s politics."

To be fair, *I, Margaret* is funnier and more successful than Holt suggests; however, it seems clear that further collaborative books are unlikely; is this also true of historical fiction?

"Apart from the Classical, the other period which interests me is the Middle Ages. In the 11th and 12th centuries you've got people who are unchangeably human, but their assumptions and beliefs, and ways of thinking are completely different to what we have now. It would be wonderful to write a book which could actually bring that out. The idea that I have for a medieval historical novel – which I'm not going to write at the moment, because it would be simply self-indulgent to do it, and I haven't got the time and the energy for it – would be centred around the troubadours in southern France in the 12th century. All of a sudden, coming out of nowhere as far as I can see, you have

people who write the most incredibly beautiful and pure music – unparalleled as far as I'm concerned; also they're poets, and they're people of a tremendous concentration of expression and clarity of vision. They come out of nowhere, out of very basic peasant societies, and then they vanish; they leave no trace behind on the European psyche: a brief flash of people writing incredibly personal songs about their own feelings, and then they're gone and we're back to an impersonal medieval background, and nothing comparable emerges until the 16th century. I'd like to write a book which would make sense of who these people were."

So, if he isn't pursuing this line, what is he working on at the moment?

"I'm working on another fantasy, which I'm quite pleased with, which oddly enough is about troubadours, or at least it's about Blondel. It occurred to me that if I wanted to write about time, and get all the time jokes in, then I should have someone who's looking for someone else, and not just through space but also through time. It struck me that the most romantic story I know of someone looking for someone else is that of Blondel looking for Richard the Lionheart. I wondered how it would be if not only did Blondel have to go and sing under all the castle battlements in space, but also all the castle battlements in time as well.

"The idea is that the Crusades have brought together all the people of Europe to try and establish the Kingdom of God. If it had worked it would have caused tremendous problems, because it would indeed unite all the people of Europe in the Kingdom of God on Earth, which would have been a bloody nuisance because that wasn't supposed to happen then. Something had to be done to stop it happening, and therefore the Crusade had to fail: and because Richard was a charismatic person, and a warrior-king and perfectly capable of taking Jerusalem with one hand tied behind his back, it was necessary for him to disappear. He was therefore abstracted by the heavenly hierarchy and hidden in one of the time-archives, which is where they put all the bits of time which have gone wrong or are out of place, history being a continuous process of editing."

The Blondel novel is the work in progress, but it won't be the next Tom Holt title to be published; that will be the book he mentioned earlier which deals with the Roman gods.

"It's called *Ye Gods*: the twelve Olympians didn't go away at the end of the Classical period. They're still up there but they have nothing to do with us; since we no longer sacrifice to them, they don't see why they should put themselves out on our behalf; the world carries on perfectly well without them getting involved. But Jupiter has

a weakness for mortal ladies and he pops down into the 1970s and sires a hero, the first hero for many generations, a hero on the old model. He has an unhappy childhood because he grows up killing monsters, and the only monsters he can find in suburban England are zoo animals. He keeps bringing home dead elephants and things like that which his mortal father has to bury in the garden when nobody's looking. He comes to maturity, or semi-maturity, at a time when there is a crisis which needs the intervention of a hero; the crisis involves one of my favourite themes which is a threat to the continued existence of comedy from the Olympian gods. Comedy has always been a particularly sore subject with them because they are so inherently ridiculous; in the old days mankind has been able to beat them by laughing at them, and they always wanted to find some way of getting back and getting in control, and they can't do that for as long as comedy exists. So they have a diabolical plot to get rid of comedy. Our hero, although supposedly on the side of the gods, has to make his mind up as to whose side he's really on."

Tom Holt's novels are published in the UK by Macdonald/Orbit.

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the blackness

David Redd

The chewed morsel in her mouth had grown tasteless. Marianne spat it out.

It was time she moved. Around her the dull winter whiteness of the island was without colour and almost without life. Marianne was shivering, ankle-deep in snow, the Arctic air chilling her with its emptiness and silence.

Marianne could still see Dagfin. His distant figure was now no more than a tiny dark dot, crawling imperceptibly up the snowy slopes of Grokenburg.

I can't follow him up there. It's too high, too steep.

She had tried to accompany him twice before, in the early days of their stay on the island. Each time a fear of the blackness had come to her, and Dagfin had gone on to climb the mountain alone.

At last Marianne turned away. She could not bear to keep watching until he was lost to view. He might be gone for hours or for days. As for herself, there was still some time left before darkness. She could return to their wooden cabin, to that cramped airless box where she could barely stand upright, or she could go down the snowfield to the little bay of Olafshavn

where sometimes a seal would appear on the ice. Seals were alive. The sea-birds were alive. Yet her hope of seeing something alive at Olafshavn was countered by her memory of the fear. Her choice was to imprison herself in the hut, or to risk seeing the blackness again.

She went down towards the sea.

Tramping along in snowshoes and all-enveloping furs, Marianne was conscious of her ungainly figure. Out here her coverings concealed her real self. She wondered moodily why Dagfin wished to wander away so often. Perhaps he had lost interest in her, instead falling under the spell of the white desolation around them. She guessed that he was seeking more burial cairns, the mounds of stones left by previous men, but why should he climb the mountain for them when many cairns lay nearby under the shoreline snows? There were so many things which Dagfin would not tell her. And this was wrong, his distancing of her, because she wished to be close to him in every way. She did not understand why they should be separated.

She came at last to the slope above Olafshavn. Here



an icefield curved down gently into the bay, between the near-vertical cliffs of twin headlands on either side. In a landscape of unchanging whiteness the sea was grey and fluid. She could see the water's edge, where shrunken waves pawed the thin pebbles and mouthed at her with hissing, formless speech. This was the same ocean that rose against Arctic fishermen, and sucked a few more into the depths year after year. More slowly now, drawn reluctantly towards the sea, she made her way to the narrow beach beside the ice. On the headland to her right was an ancient cairn, shrouded in snow.

The beach was only exposed at low tide. Marianne stood on the damp pebbles and let the cold seawind slide against her numb cheeks. Icebergs, small remnants of the retreating pack-ice, drifted as pale fragments in the dull grey swell.

She gazed everywhere, but there were no seals.

Olafshavn was one of the few safe landing-places on Karl Johan Island. Near Marianne's hut were piles of refuse under the snow where

the university summer expeditions had camped. During her attempt at keeping a journal Marianne had described even earlier visitors...

Before the geologists came the crews of whaling vessels, searching for fresh meat. The reindeer and the rare Karl Johan fox were almost exterminated. Previously, English and Dutch traders paid occasional visits, each captain thinking the island a new discovery and naming it afresh. And before that, long before, the little Eskimo people sailed up from Iceland and clung to a short, dismal existence beside the hostile sea. All these people, the geologists and the whalers, the traders and the Inuit, were long since gone.

Marianne felt a coldness deepening within her as she stood facing the icy sea. A few pieces of driftwood lay scattered like bones upon the shore, but she made no move to collect them. She wished there were seals. The shifting waves seemed to growl with submerged pebbles rumbling in the undertow. So many people had been here over the years; and all had departed, defeated by the loneliness and the cruel Polar wastes.

She turned her eyes towards the peak of Grokenburg,

hoping to see Dagfin, but he had disappeared from sight.

Around the bay, spray fringing the cliffs formed white billows against the dark sea-washed rocks. On little ledges the eider-ducks must be huddling unseen, she knew, but they would be very few in number. They too had been hunted. Marianne gazed across the sea, sensing its terrible emptiness and its absolute hostility to human warmth. She could feel a strange uneasiness. If only something were alive out here –

A flutter of wings caught her eye: two eider-ducks at last, rising swiftly from among the broken ice. She watched them fly together, two dark specks reaching a resting-place on the cliff. But why had they chosen that moment to leave the sea?

She knew, even as the shadow began to form under the ripples, that the blackness was returning.

The shape grew clearer under the grey water. It took form in the shallows and Marianne screamed. She spun away from its dark presence. She began to run.

It had always appeared like this. An unreasoning fear of the empty world, a glimpse of blackness. So many others had felt this terror here.

"Dag...Dagfin..." She knew he would never hear her across the island. Her voice was weak and the black thing behind her was drawing her strength. Her only hope was to keep running, back to things familiar and solid, back to the enclosing shelter of her hut.

Marianne ran desperately, clumsily. She should never have come here. Once she turned her head to look back, and for an instant she saw the hunched shape partially risen from the sea. Even at that distance its eyes peered hungrily at her, piercingly, as if angry that she was cheating it by fleeing.

She went on running until she had reached the level snow before her cabin. When she looked round again the rising ground had cut off Olafshavn from view, and there was only snow behind her.

Marianne took the last few paces more slowly. Always the blackness appeared in the bay; it had not yet come on to the land. Nevertheless Marianne could not bring herself to stay in the open where it might come to her again.

She tugged at the heavy timber door of the hut, and went inside.

Surrounding her in the gloom were the half-seen essentials of life: pans and furs and hunting equipment, the old metal stove, the food store. She collapsed across the bunk that was too small to stretch out upon. Dagfin's bunk, above hers, was somehow an inch longer but still too small. Her bunk with its wooden sides was like a cabin within a cabin, a prison within a prison.

Some similar cabin must have housed the seven Dutchmen, centuries before, who had wintered here to watch the whales. The blackness had come for them one by one, she was sure, for none had been found alive. On this island people could only hide themselves from the emptiness, and wait.

Marianne lay there for many hours, not eating, not moving, until Dagfin returned at last.

Everything was dark, inside and out. She heard a familiar scraping noise as he pulled aside the door. Strangely, she felt none of the eagerness she had expected.

"Marianne!" He was closing the door. "Haven't you got a light in here?"

"No."

"And the stove's gone out!"

"I didn't need it."

He grunted briefly. She waited, and he struck a match in a little explosion of light. When she stopped blinking she saw his face glowing beside a candle flame. She knew every detail of that face, every wrinkle, every hair or pore. Behind him the corner shadows gave an illusory depth to the cabin, as though it were now much larger inside than out.

Suddenly she felt him kiss her. The touch on her cheek was only momentary, but it seemed to begin a revival of her will. She began to move.

He asked, "Why haven't you eaten?"

"I wasn't hungry. Not without you."

She swung herself slowly to a sitting position, on the open edge of the bunk.

He frowned and reached for the smoke-darkened stove door. "I'd better relight this. I've warned you before about not eating – you need all your strength on this island."

"I know," she said. "I missed you."

She could not speak about the blackness to him. He was too practical, in his way. He would not believe her.

He had brought back some eggs which he had collected, more eider-ducks who would never emerge. After the long process of cleaning the stove and lighting it, he made a large omelette for them to share. He did all this with his usual sure authority, and when she protested he said "No, sit down. Let me do this for you. After you've eaten something you'll feel better."

Sometimes his kindness could be as distant as his absence.

Afterwards they sat together by the glow of the fire-box, which they left open as a small special luxury. She needed him here, with her, not out away from her looking at ancient stones. His hunting was generally unsuccessful. He had not seen any reindeer.

She asked, because he had not told her, "Did you find anything else?"

"Nothing."

Undoubtedly he knew that she had guessed the failure of his other search. He said, "On the way back I tried opening up three cairns. Small ones, close together. Nothing. Only patches of fungus on the old ground." He smiled. "I meant to bring back some more fungus for you. Once it becomes soft in your mouth it tastes different... eating something from the stones, you feel closer to the heart of this island."

"It has no heart. It's not alive."

She remembered the blackness rising in the bay, and she shivered.

Even the fungus was long dead, perhaps centuries old, dried and frozen under the snow-covered stones. "I don't want to try it again. It tasted of nothing. Didn't you uncover anything else?"

"No. I don't believe they're burial mounds at all."

"The Inuit didn't bury their dead," said Marianne.

"I know."

"They sent out the old and the sick to die in the snow, to be eaten by animals."

"But the cairns exist," said Dagfin firmly. "They were built for a purpose."

Marianne sighed. She closed her eyes. She wanted to keep Dagfin here to herself, not away scrambling over ancient mysteries. Rocks, geology, science in general were things she could understand, if she had to, not like his new absorption with the frozen wilderness.

"Those mounds are empty," she said. "There is nothing under the stones but more stones."

"Maybe. Some cairns look disturbed. Whalers digging for fancied treasure, perhaps? I wonder. Should I examine the coastal cairns more thoroughly?"

"On the coast?"

The mounds above Olafshavn? Above the sea where the blackness roamed? Marianne opened her eyes to the orange warmth of the stove. She would have to go with him, keep him in sight all the time...

"You will do what you want, as always," said Marianne sadly. "For me — I think you should see what is here."

Presently they closed the door on the stove, and settled into sleep for the night.

Dagfin let time pass in his usual unhurried fashion. It was another three days before Marianne accompanied him to the headland.

She paused on the snow-topped cliff above Olafshavn, gazing over the treacherous edge to the grey undulating sea below. She saw only the waves curving inwards, and a subdued swell against the opposite cliffs. The bay seemed empty. Even the cold breeze upon her cheek was less cutting than before.

Dagfin had walked on ahead. That was typical of him; he would not miss her until he needed her. She hurried to catch him up, her attempted running awkward in snowshoes. He must have heard her clumsy movements, for he turned and waited.

"You needn't run. We're almost there."

She shook her head, uncertain of her feelings. Was she running actually towards him, or merely away from loneliness? She could not be sure. Their most recent days in the hut had been strangely unreal: their bodies close together and their minds deeply apart. So she drew level with Dagfin, saying nothing, and walked with him in silence.

The air was like crystal above the sea, as cold and sharp as a stone each time she breathed in. Even this air was never meant for people.

Marianne could see the white mound of the cairn a short distance ahead. Dagfin had two shovels strapped with his rifle to his back; now he paused, undid them and handed one to Marianne. She nodded and held it patiently, waiting while he tucked in the loose straps. Involuntarily her gaze shifted to the dim horizon, where away from the bright whiteness of the snow a dull misty haze marked the merging of sea and sky. Out there the sea and ice continued into the high Arctic where nights were six months long and the blackness roamed unseen.

"Marianne! What are you looking at?" demanded Dagfin, one hand reaching over his shoulder for his rifle. Marianne had not realized he was watching her.

"There are no ships," she said on impulse.

"Ships?" He scarcely seemed to understand the word.

"Nothing. No people."

"Of course not. What ships would come this far north?"



With a gesture of dismissal to the idea, he led her towards the cairn.

She knew his frame of mind. To him it was inconceivable that the isolation around them could be broken.

Following his lead, she began shovelling away snow from the face of the mound. Soon she had helped uncover the large outer stones, which her shovel struck jarringly. When they had cleared away sufficient stones they rested for a while, and then began to move the stones by hand.

The work was hard. She wished she had eaten more food lately, as Dagfin had urged her to. Lifting a piece of rock, straightening her body, throwing the burden aside and bending down again...or staying crouched down to scrape away smaller debris...she would ache in punishment for many days to come. She lost count of the rest periods she needed before Dagfin was satisfied. It was a large cairn, and probably travellers had added to it as travellers do. She stood aside, and let Dagfin clear the final portion himself.

"Well?" she asked, as he ceased. "Is that enough for you?"

They had uncovered a patch of bare, rocky ground. Dagfin stood on the cleared area, his face long and grim.

"Nothing. This is the rock of the headland. The cairn was only a pile of stones. There is nothing underneath."

Marianne moved towards him, and she knelt on the frozen ground. It was not quite as empty as Dagfin had implied. The debris of other stones, both dust and pebbles, lay scattered upon it. And she saw little twists of something leathery: the fungus. She picked up one tiny scrap and offered it to Dagfin.

"You see? The cairn was not quite empty. The fungus grew here once."

He accepted the piece, and cradled it in his gloved palm. His manner suggested a new detachment from his surroundings, a concentration upon a new problem.

"It's strange, Marianne. We only find this under the cairns now, but it must have appeared everywhere at one time."

"Like the trees," said Marianne. There were now no trees on Karl Johan Island, if indeed any had ever grown here. On Karl Johan the most ordinary traces of life were absent.

"Like the people," Dagfin was saying. "They have gone."

Abruptly he stooped, and gathered up several more of the shrunken fragments.

"You should eat, Marianne. I wish you'd share this with me."

She shook her head. "That?"

Wordlessly he slipped the pieces into a pocket of his furs.

They could do nothing more here above Olafshavn, other than return the cairn to its original shape. Marianne ached at the thought of moving everything back again, but she agreed. Slowly she began heaving the stones back towards the central pile; she had to help him. Together they lifted debris, shifted it a few feet, and went back for more. Dagfin was chewing as he worked, the furs over his chin moving rhythmically up and down. Marianne was simply weary.

Dagfin had almost finished the work, and Marianne had paused to rest again, when she saw him stop.

He stood upright, his face towards the rim of the cliffs. "I think we've done enough, Marianne. Pick up your shovel. We'll go."

Silently she followed him. With a fearful glance she looked down into the bay of Olafshavn, expecting to see a blackness there, but the grey swells were undisturbed. Beneath the sea was merely deeper sea.

"Hurry," said Dagfin, and she had to move more quickly in a reluctant ungainly run. Elsewhere her appearance had been a matter for pride and pleasure...and elsewhere Dagfin had been a different person. Or had she been looking at only the outer Dagfin?

When they were within reach of the hut he halted, still just in view of the bay, and held her arm.

"Marianne - Tell me, my love, do you see anything behind us?"

She had no hesitation in speaking. "Nothing." The icy line of the sea was empty.

"Then..." Dagfin smiled, a little shamefacedly, and he lifted his rifle. "We'll wake those seabirds from their sleep."

He aimed his rifle at the sea, and fired twice. A few white dots darted from the headland as the shots reverberated across the snow. Dagfin stared seawards, and his face gradually took on a look of relief.

"I never thought it would come down from the mountain," he whispered.

"I think," said Marianne, "you have eaten too much of the fungus."

Within their little cabin, in smoky warmth, Dagfin soon fell asleep in the upper bunk. Marianne had gone beyond tiredness and lay awake. Night descended, making the shadows inside the hut even deeper.

She was quite sure that Dagfin had seen the blackness, even though he would not admit anything to her. The only problem - which kept her from mentioning her own experiences - was that today she had not been able to see it. Why had that been? Perhaps her thoughts had been too busy with Dagfin, she mused. When she could concentrate on herself, only herself upon the icy slope into Olafshavn, she would see it again.

And what had Dagfin seen on his lonely climbs up the windswept flanks of Grokenburg? Its shadow in the stones, its eyes in the ice? At least down here, as long as they were together, they were safe.

He was snoring quietly, not unpleasantly. Marianne looked upward from her bunk and wished she could see through the darkness, through the timber and cloth of the bunk above, through his flesh and bone into the soul that slept above her.

He had been a lively, easy-to-know person when first she had met him. In a short while her liking had turned to love. He was a junior member of staff at the University, where not long before he had been a student. He spoke to her of his field research trips to the Jostedal glaciers and to Karl Johan Island, and as she came to know him she learned that he intended returning to the island. It was her own idea to go with him. Her family tried to stop her, of course, but nevertheless it was arranged. By his family, at their one meeting, she seemed to be pitied. Not long after-

ards she found herself one of the only two human beings on Karl Johan Island.

Sleep would not come. Dagfin filled her thoughts.

She needed to be closer to him, far closer. Arising, she lowered her feet to the dark floor and stood almost upright, placing her arms by touch on the side of his bunk. Gently her hands felt his sleeping body, reaching for him through the black inner night. She wished she could see his face.

Marianne, at the University, had been so busy and active; as Dagfin too had been. She recalled that part of her life with amazement. Lectures; parties, meetings, excursions, meals, affairs, discoveries...so much happening in each day, so much movement and experience crammed into each hour. Painted walls, and bright clothes, and lights everywhere. Always she had been accustomed to having people around her: as a child, as a student, and at the end as a woman. Her adjustment to the emptiness of Karl Johan Island had been very painful, and the pain was not yet over. Dagfin had been so different. She had been unaware that within the man she had met was another man whom she did not know.

Her hand, still upon him, closed on something small and crinkly at his side. It must be a piece of the fungus, fallen from his clothing. She brought it closer under her nose, and with it came the familiar odour of ancient stones and ice. Would tasting this mean anything to him? No, better to mention it in the morning. Marianne tucked away the fungus inside her pocket. She was still unable to rest.

She remembered other nights, far away, when she and Dagfin had wandered for hours under the stars. She would be closer to the happiness of those nights if she went outside now, rather than staying inside with him.

Marianne moved. She opened the creaking door. His gentle snoring did not change. As silently as she could, she left the cabin.

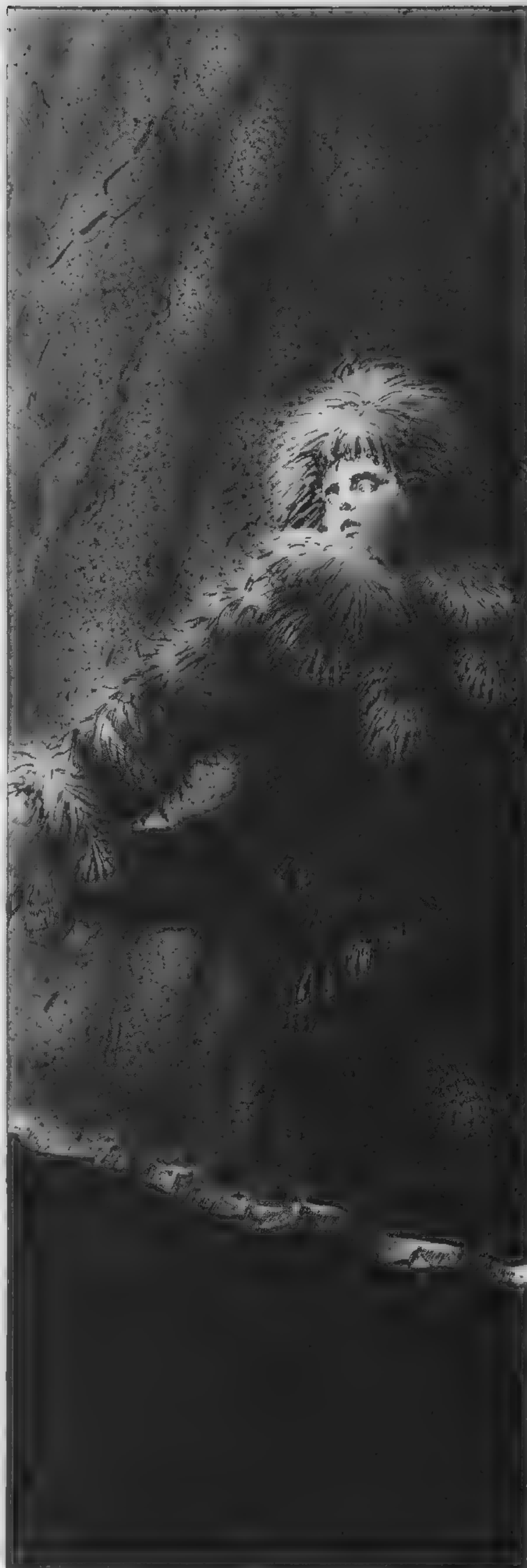
It was much colder outside, but coldness had become normal to her now.

She walked slowly and aimlessly, feeling the depth of the calm atmosphere settling around her. Karl Johan Island was another world by night, no longer raw and hostile, but merely vast and indifferent. Under moonlight the wide snowy spaces seemed pure, untainted by the grey of the sea, and the white slopes of Grokenburg towered magically into a night full of stars. Dagfin had climbed those slopes, had looked for animals and found only the fungus.

Marianne reached into her inside pocket. She brought out the little fragment which smelt of stones and ice. Dagfin had eaten of this himself, alone.

It was like biting upon papery wood, very ancient wood. She chewed it and stared at the moonlight and shadows, at the white horizon, at the sweep of Olafshavn with the cairns upon the headland. The fungus had come from those cairns. Some things Dagfin had said previously now began to make themselves understood.

The island must have been warmer when the fungus was growing. Perhaps the longships had voyaged here, in the brief warm years when even Greenland had known its Norse settlements. The seaborne warriors had erected the cairns, and later visitors had



plundered the mounds after the ice had reclaimed its island. That was one possibility. Another, which she liked less, was that the old Inuit had built the cairns. Surely the Arctic dwellers would never have built in stone. They belonged to an earlier, more primitive time, when the great ice and its terrors still gripped the world. And the disappearance of the Inuit from these outer islands was still a mystery.

Marianne walked on, feeling the dreadful isolation of all those who had walked these snowfields before. She had come here with Dagfin, and she was still alone. The night around her seemed endless. The fungus was becoming softer in her mouth, gradually dissolving away, as she found herself circling towards the bay of Olafshavn.

She had not wished to visit the bay tonight. However, it was near and familiar, and she need only pass it without going down to the sea. Moonlight was glinting from the tip of a far-off iceberg. She walked on.

She felt no surprise, somehow, when from the darkness between her and the water a deeper darkness became visible.

The blackness was huge, with great round eyes. She had never seen it so clearly before now. It came with a slow gliding motion across the snow, as a vast slug might slide across stone, and its eyes were shining under the moon.

Marianne walked more quickly, retreating from the shore, but the blackness was gaining on her and turning her back. She had come from the cabin without a weapon, nothing but a small useless knife. Her mood was scarcely her own. The thing was following her, and yet she was unafraid. She had known this would happen. All through her time on the island the dark shape had been watching her, as it watched everyone in the northern seas. She hurried towards the headland.

A remnant of the fungus was still in her mouth. Perhaps people who never tasted the fungus never saw the blackness, never knew what had killed them. Even a rifle was no protection against the fear inside.

Her feet dragged more slowly, through powdery snow. Ahead was the first cairn of the headland, above the windswept cliffs where eider-ducks nested. Marianne turned, realizing that she was trapped, and she discovered the blackness almost upon her. She stumbled. The blackness came onwards.

On her feet again, exhausted, she saw no refuge in sight, only the sheer edge of the cliffs. Always she had feared to climb the cliffs, yet it was this or face the greater fear behind. Marianne ventured out onto the stones, where her path narrowed to almost nothing against the cliffs.

Her arms spread out against the wall of rock. The sea murmured below her.

Where eider-ducks could perch, a human foot could tread. Marianne inched forwards to a slight widening of the ledge, trying not to think of the patches of frozen snow, the outcurving of the rock face, or the emptiness above the sea. She could not look down. With immense caution she reached the little recess in the rock, but could go no further. She crouched down. Slowly she looked back for the blackness, for the eyes of night which swallowed all life.

The shadow had halted. It was waiting for her to move again.

She could not go forward. If she went back, she would meet the blackness.

Marianne swallowed hard. She knew the thing could wait there for all time. Its dark, formless body settled like a huge shadow across the slope above Olafshavn, seemingly unable to flow along narrow ledges, but waiting on the wider ground to claim her as it had claimed so many others before her.

How long she remained in this impasse could not be known. She dared not move again. The night seemed to be whispering with the voices of a hundred shadows, a hundred memories of life long since gone. The blackness reached momentarily to the sea. It engulfed some fish, and two seabirds near the cliff. They cried like ice and were gone. The breath of the night grew louder, like voices. She knew then that all mankind went into the blackness.

I am Hans Herrmann. I came here to study minerals.

But he had stepped over the cliff, into the waiting sea.

I am Captain Willem Van Syl. Our ship was wrecked, now we are dying one by one upon this empty shore...

She seemed to hear him speaking, but he had been engulfed centuries before.

"I don't want you," said Marianne into the night. "I want Dagfin."

Her voice dwindled away. The whispers returned.

I am Karl Hammer-hand. I fell from the sail and Ran took me in her nets...

"Be silent," said Marianne. "I want Dagfin."

Upon the white frozen cliff lay the blackness, watching her. Below her was emptiness and sea. She breathed cold winter air, and listened.

I am Igaluk. I sailed to the warm islands where there is no ice. Then storms drove the oomiak north...

"I don't want you," said Marianne into darkness. "I want Dagfin!"

But the whispering went on. Perhaps they were not real voices, only echoes of the people who had once lived here. Mostly they were the old ones of the ice huts, toothless and feeble with minds numbed by the fungus. And there were whispers of other things, of stones and ice and the coldness of the sea.

Marianne waited. Eventually this night would be over and Dagfin would awake. And then? Marianne waited.

Time became meaningless to her. Greyness filtered into the sky as she crouched stiffly on the ledge above Olafshavn, but under the pale sun the shadows remained. The blackness was unchanging, but it was as old as life. It remained upon the cliff, and in its silent whispering there echoed the frozen air over the great unbroken ice of ten thousand years ago. Marianne tried hard to recall Dagfin's arms around her last summer. But last summer was a world left behind, and nothing could bring it back. She felt so very dishearteningly cold.

Coldest of all was the knowledge that even if Dagfin came now, she would never recapture that summer. The blackness would be waiting still. And with this understanding there came bitterness, for the man she had followed was not hers and never had been hers. He had only pretended to be hers for a while.

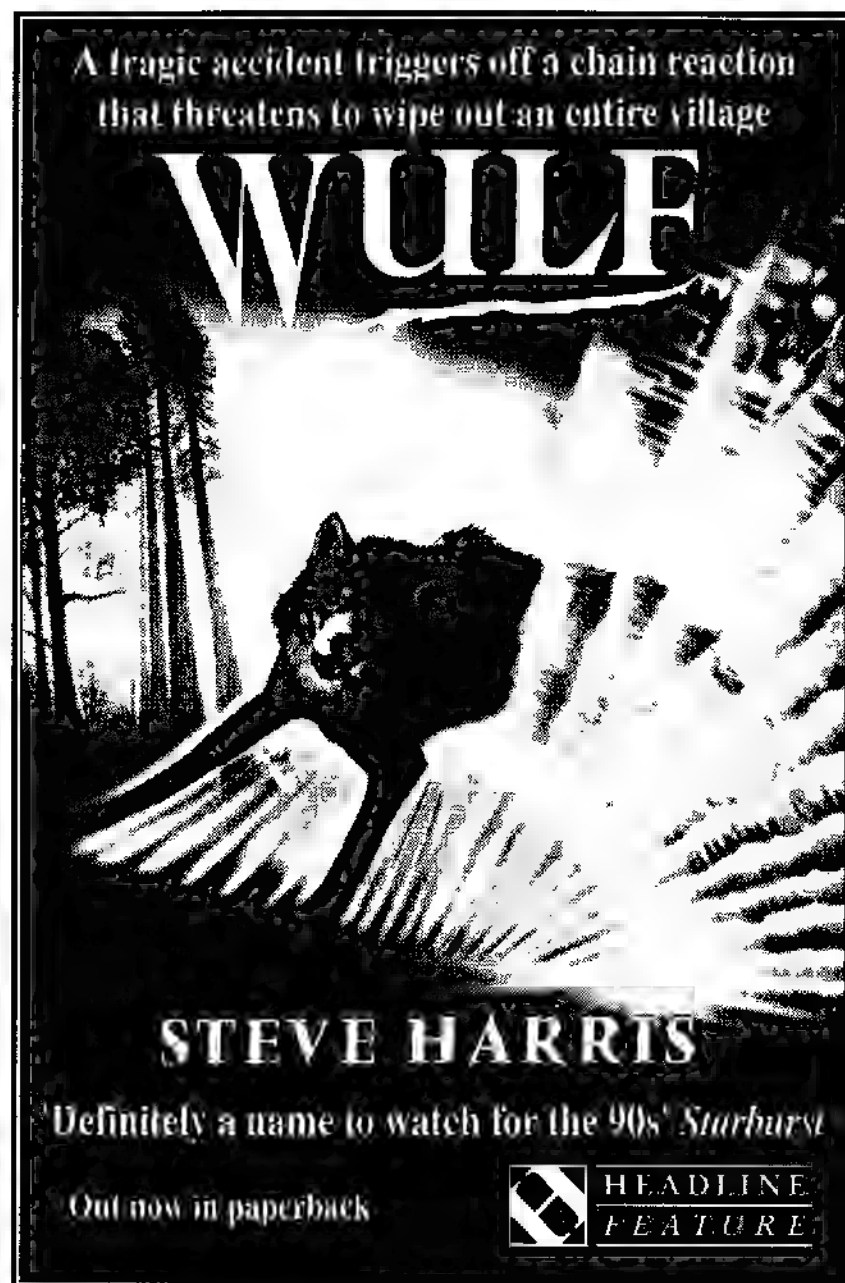
Marianne arose.

She seemed to float back along the narrow ledge: towards the blackness.

I am Marianne. I followed Dagfin into the ice, because I loved him.

But when Dagfin next awoke, the thing which would follow him would not be Marianne.

David Redd is a native of Wales who once volunteered to write us an article on "Welsh SF" but then found himself lost for anything to say. He began publishing sf in 1966 – we well remember his stories "The Way to London Town" and "Prisoners of Paradise" in *New Worlds* in July and October of that year. Since then, his work has appeared sporadically in *F&SF*, *If*, *Interzone* and elsewhere. His last story here was "Green and Pleasant Land" (issue 32).



WRITE TO INTERZONE

We enjoy receiving feedback from our readers, and we hope to publish a lively letters column in each issue.

Please send your comments, opinions, reactions, to the magazine's main editorial address. We may not be able to reply to all letters, but we do read them and may well be influenced by them.

Interaction

Continued from page 5

Dear Editors:

I feel I should complement you with your magazine. My subscription has just entered its second year and I must say that I haven't regretted subscribing one bit. My main interest lies in the fiction and the book reviews, but the comments, TV and film reviews are close runners-up. I'm least interested in the interviews, mainly because most of the persons interviewed are unknown to me. But because of the interviews I might get interested in certain writers, so they should by all means stay in the magazine. As if you were going to drop them!

In my opinion the best illustrations to date are supplied by Martin McKenna. Please compliment him for his work on my account. Iain Byers also delivers quality illustrations which are always a great contribution to both the story and the magazine.

The stories McKenna supplied the illustrations for are among my favourites. "Crossroads" by Paul J. McAuley was great, as were the stories by the partnership of Kim Newman and

Eugene Byrne. Greg Egan and Eric Brown are two more of my favourite writers in *Interzone*. IZ 53 was absolutely brilliant and so was IZ 52 and if the following issues are of the same quality you won't hear any complaints from me.

P. Wenings

Donkerbroek, Netherlands

Dear Editors:

Andy Robertson's thoughtful review of *Ragnarok* (IZ 54) misses the main point of our endeavours. Our motivation in writing the thing was expressly to convey the message that "Green" extremists can be as misguided and "misled by their own propaganda" as more familiar villains such as nasty capitalists. It is dangerous to confuse the views of the characters in a book with those of the authors! If anyone comes away from reading *Ragnarok* with second thoughts about ecodoom propaganda, we have succeeded.

By the way, it was *The Sixth Winter* (which I wrote with Douglas Orgill), not *The Seventh Winter*. I'm saving that title for a sequel.

John Gribbin

Piddinghoe, East Sussex

Spend the Giant Pizza

John Clute

Those readers lucky enough to get sight of David Langford's superb *Ansible*, and who had the chance to read issue 52 of the best fanzine now published in this country which gets to be seen by people like myself, will know what I'm going to say, for I am there. The anecdote Langford tells is this. It is 17th October 1991, and a bunch of us are crammed into an exhibition space shaped like an anorexic U to honour the publication of some graphic novels from Gollancz. David Pringle, the last surviving *Interzone* editor (or *Con-Com Mommy*, as Roberta Rogow might put it in jest [see below]), hands to his reviewer a book for review. It is **FutureSpeak: A Fan's Guide to the Language of Science Fiction** (Paragon House, \$24.95) by Roberta Rogow (see above), and his reviewer Mr Clute (for it is I) opens the book at a page previously selected by Mr Pringle and discovers Roberta Rogow's definition of Slans. Just as David Langford (who was watching) did in *Ansible*, I now quote the definition in full:

Slans (literary): Superhuman successors to homo sapiens in a SERIES of stories by A.E. Van Vogt, beginning in 1925 with *Galactic Lensman*. Early SF FANS wore BUTTONS that announced "Fans Are Slans!" "This entry," said Mr Clute, apparently into a hearing ear of Mr Langford, "has more mistakes than words."

Untrue.

That was an error of my own. The entry has a lot more words than mistakes, and it would be terribly unfair to the author of *FutureSpeak*, or to the task she has – with, one must admit, extremely variable felicity – tried to accomplish, to leave anyone with the impression that all 400 pages of the book are equally dazed by a similar inattention to fact.

But now that her version of Slans is on the carpet, it would be equally unfair to let it sit there pooping up the room, because she did, in truth, make a fine old mess of the entry, the kind of fine old mess that makes one question the methodology of a book which purports to deal in data. Slans were, in fact, superhuman successors to homo sapiens in a novel by A.E. van Vogt first published as a serial in *Astounding* in 1940, and first published as a book in 1946. *Slan*, we might add, was not a fixup (van Vogt's own term), nor was it in any other way even super-

ficially unlike a novel. No one has ever called it anything but a novel. There is no source Roberta Rogow could have stumbled across which called it anything but a novel. The 1940 version was written as a novel, published as a novel, and received as a novel by the fans who began almost immediately to construct Slanshacks (which she mentions in the next entry, but seems to think were a phenomenon of the 1970s) to become superior (or unwet when it rained) in.

What's more, Roberta Rogow, had she bothered to check on any of a hundred sources, would have been able to stop there. She would not have gone on to confuse A.E. van Vogt with E.E. Smith, or Slans with Lensmen. She would not have suggested that either A.E. van Vogt – who she thought she was talking about – or E.E. Smith – to whom she was in fact referring – had published anything as early as 1925. She would not have suggested that the first *Slan* story was a novel about *Galactic Lensmen*. She would not have suggested that this story was published in a year no story (or novel) called *Galactic Lensman* was published. She would not have suggested, in any case, that a novel called *Galactic Lensman* was ever published, because no novel of that title ever was, not even by David Kyle. She would not have suggested that it was a legitimate scholarly guesstimate (which she defines in her book as an estimate which is guessed at, as opposed to – one must guesstimate – an estimate which is estimated at) to extract the first word from the title of E.E. Smith's *Galactic Patrol* (1937-38 *Astounding*; 1950), and the second word from the title of his *Gray Lensman* (1939-40 *Astounding*; 1951), and to use the nonexistent title thus derived as the name of a nonexistent book dated with a nonexistent date and sent on a nonexistent mission. All very strange.

Very strange, and very disconcerting. It gave one to think. It gave one to trawl *FutureSpeak* for the shape of the Blemish of Roberta Rogow (all encyclopedists have a Blemish), and indeed I came up with something. Roberta Rogow began as a fan and has weighted *FutureSpeak* towards fan language, game-world idioms, and television, and practical terminology; and in general she does a rather good job of defining a whole range of shadowy

terms. She is good on back-story, and on fan-fic, and slash fiction, and generation ship, and male bonding, and a couple of hundred others. *FutureSpeak*, when used with the utmost caution, is a valuable book, and its guesstimates about matters of guesstimation might well generate some interesting discussions. And she's genuinely good on vocabulary items like *corpsicle*, which she attributes properly to Frederik Pohl, not Larry Niven (who has been trying in vain to give Pohl the credit for years now).

But she does have a Blemish, and her Blemish is dates. It is not, perhaps, the most convenient Blemish for an encyclopedist to sport. She thinks, for instance, that John W. Campbell stopped editing *Analog* in 1965, when in fact he only stopped editing *Analog* at the moment of his death in 1971. She thinks Einstein won his Nobel Prize in 1905, when in fact his Prize was awarded in 1921. She thinks Isaac Asimov began to publish the magazine versions of *Foundation* stories in 1950, when in fact the first *Foundation* story appeared in 1942. She thinks *Mad* magazine began in 1959, when in fact *Mad*, in its most famous incarnation as a comic book, began in 1952; and less interestingly became a magazine in 1955 (and she thinks it was "begun" by its producer, William Gaines, rather than the man who created and partially drew it, Harvey Kurtzman, whom she does not mention: but that's not a date issue). She does not think Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) has a date. Her disregard of dates, in other words, spans genres, empires, generations, continents. It is not local.

So who checked the book for this sort of crap? One day's work on the part of one competent copy-editor who did not share the same Blemish could have eliminated everything I've mentioned, and everything I haven't bothered to. A copy editor after one day's work might not, perhaps, have restored Harvey Kurtzman; or insisted that, if there were only room to mention three writers as being associated with the British New Wave, those three writers should not perhaps have been Thomas M. Disch, Philip K. Dick and Barry N. Malzberg; or hinted that an entry on *Future History* might somehow seem *Hamlet* without the Prince if it didn't mention Robert A. Heinlein. Some of this is certainly Roberta Rogow's fault, and I would certainly

be inclined to blame her for forgetting about Heinlein, or thinking Philip K. Dick had anything to do with the British New Wave. I do not, however, much blame her for the factual chaos. Her editor at Paragon House must have known – because it was so very obvious – that Roberta Rogow had no head for dates; and it is the fault of Paragon House that *FutureSpeak*, despite its hundreds of felicities, must not be allowed in the hands of children:

I speak all this feelingly, from the heart, as an encyclopedist myself, one right now in the throes of attempting to land his part of an encyclopedic mission on deadline, in time, error-free, ignorant of bias, comprehensive and kind and serendipitous. I am not entirely sure I know my own Blemish it probably has something to do with what I have tentatively identified as Theme Blindness but I do know I pray for help, and expect help, and get it. And I know that some of the errors of fact and tone Peter Nicholls and I and Brian Stableford commit in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* will stain the final book, despite copy-editing, despite re-reading and re-checking, despite ample time to study proofs. It is in the nature of a reference book to be, once in a while, wrong. What has to be avoided is any sense that the wrongness derives from any assumption that being wrong doesn't matter. I think Roberta Rogow is a writer of decent heart, considerable energy, and decided sharpness. But I think she was very foolish to let her book go to press without a chaperone. Because from now on, and very unfairly, *FutureSpeak* is going to be a book with a reputation for being easy.

It was the intention of this reviewer to speak, as normal, about some normal books, but it is not to be. There is no space, and there is no time to think, because the authors ostensibly under review are Howard Waldrop, whose brilliant *Night of the Cooters: More Neat Stuff* (Legend, £6.99) is now available in the UK; and Gwyneth Jones, who has written in *White Queen* (Gollancz, £14.99) her best novel since *Divine Endurance* (1984): no, it is a better book than *Divine Endurance*. Neither Waldrop nor Jones make much sense until they are thought about, and thinking is slow work, and this reviewer does not have the mind to do it. Full coverage will follow in a month's time, after a certain task (see above) has begun to slacken off. So take a blind chance on the two.

The Waldrop is easy, it's a paperback original, it presents the entire contents of the American edition (*Night of the Cooters: More Neat Stories*, 1991) plus *A Dozen Tough Jobs* (1989), which was reviewed in *Interzone* 31 as a separate book. It is Texas in the fire of the days of ending, buy it. The Jones is harder,

because it is a less easy read, and because it is in hardback. But every word counts this time round, there is none of the gossiping that muddled *Kairos*, it is cogent and tough and content-driven and I think it may be wise. So buy it. Spend the five beers. Spend the one giant pizza. Please, books are dying. Spend the giant pizza.

(John Clute)

Works Mary Gentle

We read too much. A chronological slice through our particular generation will reveal us reading from kindergarten to thirtysomething and then burning out. Able to juggle tropes and themes, deconstructions and reconstructions and analyses; but nothing does it to us any more. Not like it used to. We go on to other things for kicks.

Then something comes along that works

All this by way of preamble to *Naomi's Room* (HarperCollins, £13.99 and £8.99), which actually had your hardbitten reviewer sleeping with the light on. I know my peculiarities: sure, I'm susceptible to stories in the tone of M.R. James. But shit, does Jonathan Aycliffe get it right.

Naomi's Room begins with Charles Hillenbrand, a Cambridge academic, the modern counterpart of one of James's dons, sitting in an empty house and planning to burn family photographs of himself, his also-academic wife Laura, and his child. Twenty years ago, in 1970, the narrator took his four-year-old daughter Naomi to Hamleys for Christmas. Now, he sometimes finds discarded in the house her hair-ribbon, but will not touch it – "It might still have been warm."

The narratives segues elegantly between the happenings of twenty years ago, and the hauntings of the present, until the two confabulate and move on to crisis. The style is dry, spare, outlining images with great colour and clarity, and shearing away – at least for the first two-thirds of the book – from overtly gory descriptions. As Thomas Harris does with Hannibal Lecter, so Aycliffe with his horrors: less is more. A long passage in which only a crowded store at Christmas is described is chilling by implication of menace. Then Laura is brought only her child's clothes to make a formal identification, and Charles realizes that the police "knew even then, of course. Not the fine details, but the more obvious things, like the fact that her hands were missing."

There is more. How many figures are in the photographs? Who are the

Liddleys? Why is what happens to Naomi the beginning of the story, and not the end? *Naomi's Room* is probably most effective before the explanations become apparent, when the screws of unseen threat are tightened, and one knows nothing except that there is something, unbounded in its capacity to do harm. The resolution must both name and show the monster. And yet the tension slackens only a very little; and while the end is unJamesian, it has its own power to chill.

Naomi's Room is also, at 173 pages, both economic and completely efficient. It's copyright Denis MacEoin/Daniel Easterman; under which second name "Jonathan Aycliffe" also writes thrillers. Go check 'em out.

Moving from Aycliffe's plain, intelligent, and sophisticated writing to *Ring of Charon* (Orbit, £14.95), I have to admit, stripped my mental gearbox. Everything that is juvenile about sf is wrong with this novel – clunkily written, barely characterized, and with a fixation on Big Dumb Objects. One notes from the blurb that Roger MacBride Allen has won a Best Short Story award from *Analog*, which is enough of a pedigree to indicate what you're going to get; and if you like that, this is what you will like.

On the other hand, it is oddly reassuring to find that someone is still writing this kind of science fiction. Or indeed, any kind of recognizable this-is-what-we-used-to-read sf. *Ring of Charon* has a gloss of liberal sensibilities, but otherwise you can find this novel being produced anytime from the fifties to the seventies: by Niven, Clarke, Charles Sheffield, et al.

Built around Pluto's moon is a massive gravity-field generator, the eponymous *Ring of Charon*. It is run by scientists out of central casting – sour, disappointed director; sensitive woman scientist; under-socialized boy genius – each given just a touch of the real. Larry Chao, the mixed race (liberal sensibillites dept.) genius works out a way to focus a minutely-weak gravity field, and, to keep the director from hushing up the result and shutting down the project, beams the gravity laser signal to the other inhabited places of the solar system: Mars, Venus, the Moon, Earth. Not for nothing is *Ring of Charon* subtitled "The First Book of the Hunted Earth." On receiving the weak signal, something very startling happens to Earth...

There have been enough interpolated passages in italics that the reader by this time knows there is Something In The Moon, which has had certain reflexes triggered off by the graser. Larry Chao, scientist wonder-boy and inventor of directional gravity, has woken something that really knows how to manipulate that enigma of a

force. The narrative proceeds, somewhat after the manner of Leiber's *The Wanderer*, to follow groups and individuals affected by this, from scapegoat scientists and scientist saviours (you didn't really think all the scientists were going to be bad guys, did you?) to Belt miners, Naked Purps (a cheapshot at anarchists, to contrast with the reason of science, I think) and the hapless inhabitants of missing Earth. There are Dyson Spheres, Von Neumann machines. There is much made of a Knowledge Crash, the familiar idea that jobs may become so complex that training for them takes a whole lifetime; but none of the featured scientists, curiously, seem to be affected by this.

Actually it is all rather endearing, once one can make that mental gear-change associated with so much of sf. Okay, so it's badly written, naively characterized, and people info-dump at each other *ad infinitum*; still, there is the mind-bogglingness of alien forces who can actually do what they do, in a universe in which gravity and all its amazements generate a startling sense of wonder. The Big Dumb Object still works. As for this being "The First Book," and Allen promising in the Acknowledgements that all his novels will stand alone – I don't think I want to read the info-dump that will probably start Book Two.

Peter James' *Twilight* (Gollancz, £14.99) wears its info-dumps well, although this horror/thriller novel is not necessarily about what it thinks it is about. What it thinks it is about is Out Of Body and Near Death Experiences. Two narratives strands parallel each other: that of the American Kate Hemingway (no relation), investigative journalist working on the local paper at Brighton; and Harvey, haunted by a near-death experience to the extent that he is willing to inflict them on others for purposes of study.

What *Twilight* is good on is working on a local newspaper, being sent out to cover the everyday minutiae – Honeymoon Couple Killed in Crash – and the more odd, such as the woman possibly buried alive. And good on hospital details.

"Kate" is a cheat, in some senses, being an American woman living in England, cut off from her family, and with no close friends, which I guess saves the male author the trouble of providing her with the emotional and social support-system women tend to build. All Kate has to brighten up her life instead of social context is a hero out of Mills & Boon, with rumpled hair, Irish eyes, cute smile and cardigan. "Kate" could have been male, of course, but that would have meant we didn't get the full effect of the girl-reporter breaking into mortuary and hiding on top of the bodies scene. Not

exactly stalk-and-slash, *Twilight*, but with suffering-heroine antecedents that go back to *Clarissa*. Read it for the detail, and the ending, which works.

Letters from Home (Women's Press, £6.95) is, I guess, probably one of the last books to come out from this publisher under the aegis of Sarah Lefanu, who here collects stories from Pat Cadigan, Karen Joy Fowler and Pat Murphy. Difficult to label, these are differing stories of magic, horror, sf, fantasy and realism; mostly with the bite or uncertainty that comes from female experience.

Karen Joy Fowler brings us the title story, telling what the young women did while the young men were being sent to Vietnam –

"the truth is that some of us went to jail. (Damn few I know.) Some of us were killed. (And the numbers are irrelevant.) Some of us went to Canada and to Sweden. And some of us had a great time. But it wasn't a clean escape, really, for any of us."

That awareness of infinite ambiguity brings us slap up against the real world. For a variation in tone there is "The Faithful Companion at Forty," telling a well-known story, naturally enough, from the sidekick's point of view. There is, here and in the other two authors, a bitter humour, a raucous satire, as well as the eye for sharp realism.

I just wish I thought *Letters from Home* would be bought by people who don't buy Women's Press books. It's value is plain to see – if you're looking.

Peter Kruger's *Fahrenbrink* (Digithurst Press, £14.95), on the other hand, is an enigma. It is written as by a son in 2032 following the trail of his father, in 1991, in Germany. Transcripts of tapes, audio cassettes, and a diary follow, in which a Peter Kruger's identity, actions, literary output and past are deconstructed, and possibly reconstructed, with the aid of a computer programme and VR.

Published by Digithurst Limited, resident in Royston, *Fahrenbrink* features a computer/publishing firm called Digithurst, in Royston. Which is also where the publicity material comes from. Much play is made with the text of a poem, "Three Journeys Into the Labyrinth" by Peter Jarman. A note on the copyright page states "Three Journeys..." to have been published by Peter Kruger under the name "Peter Jarman." *Fahrenbrink* is the fourth journey. The publicity material states that the computer programme featured, PictureBook, is available on request.

Borges, where are you now?

Finally there is *Imajica* (Harper-Collins, £15.99), Clive Barker's latest. The *Imajica* are the Five Dominions, of which one – ours – is cut off

from the others; somewhat in the manner of C.S. Lewis's science-fictional trilogy. The other Dominions are, like Perelandra and Malcandra, regions of strangeness and charm; full of bright beings and different humanity following only slightly other hungers to ourselves. Between Earth and the remainder of the *Imajica* is the In Ovo, a chaotic region, home of monsters, which only the magi may cross, with appropriate preparation and power. And the First Dominion lies concealed behind a screen of Nothing, and is rumoured to hide God...

About the first third of *Imajica* is fine. John Furie Zacharias, known as Gentle, an art forger with an amnesiac memory, becomes entangled with Judith Odell, and with the assassin whom Judith's estranged husband wishes on her. We journey out of the Fifth Dominion, our world, into the other four. Strangenesses abound, enough to make us forget the nagging suspicion that the Second and Third dominions, fabulous Yzorderrex included, are a slightly fantasy-skewed travelogue of India and Tibet. And the androgyne-hermaphrodite Pie'oh'pah is a glamorous enigma.

The premises – that magic is the one true religion, that Earth is cut off from other spiritual/material dimensions except for the reach of a few magi, that this theological hurt has somehow to be healed – all of this is full of brightly-coloured and pleasing shapes, and the narrative engine roars with fuel to spare. As for the scenery, New York is there, and London – very much London, with something of the magical dust-and-dirt glamour of the other Dominions' cities. It is in one sense a very English book, or at least a Western one, the other Dominions resembling a fever-dream of the Third World. In a nice touch, tourism operates mostly in the other direction...

One can't have magic without conspiracy theory these days, and *Imajica*'s anti-magic conspiracy of 18th-century aristocrats, and their present-day incarnation in a building too boring to be noticed (another nice touch) is reminiscent of Tim Powers without the bite. Requisite oppositions are set up between those who would advance the reconciliation, and those who want to prevent it. Ambiguities abound.

But *Imajica* is too long for itself, and it suffers a failure of imagination in the climax. The trouble is that Jude and Gentle both have, without being much concerned about it, memories that cease ten years back on a rolling basis. It becomes clear early on that our protagonists are in possession of identities hidden from themselves, and becomes clear far too early what these are. And once one allows deistic powers into the merely human it is a difficult narrative trick to get the reader to care what happens to these invulnerable people.

And as for the climax, that depends on a mind-boggling failure of Omnipotence. The book is good at gross images that work, but the one at the conclusion is ultimately pretty silly. Some narrative signals are set up that one villain will repent, and be reconciled (in a book that is to do with reconciliation), but the signals point to nothing. The ultimate reconciliation turns out to be an act of violence, not meshing with what was set up as the basic principles of this particular story.

I may (indeed I do) disagree violently with the spiritual structure behind Perelandra and Thulcandra, but Lewis's theology has the resonances of two thousand years behind it, and the rigidity to give his background rigour. *Imajica* descends into a soup of semi-Hermeticism and ill-realized Goddess principles. It ricochets between bathos and wonder, neither economic nor efficient except in parts.

But for all that, when one reaches the very end, the eucatastrophe works.

(Mary Gentle)

The Elf Gets Irritable Wendy Bradley

Get out the sick bags, short-ears. This elf has just about had enough (damn that decadent letter "n") of the kind of manuscript where the publishers seem to have saved time by weighing it rather than reading it.

Take Piers Anthony and Robert E. Margroff's *Dragon's Gold* (Grafton, £3.99) – please! It has round-eared freaks in a pointy-eared world, a prophecy about a roundear who will free the country from the evil queen and her wizard father, dragons with gold bearing scales, and a big gap in reality through which other universes can presumably be reached but through which the local kids throw rocks. It also has a manic depressive shorteared hero with an identikit girlfriend and a feisty tomboy sister. It is the plotline following the tomboy sister that makes me sick. OK, so she gets to do a major bit of timely rescuing but she has to pay for it by lots of angst about whether she's a "real" girl, and she finds out she really is when she winds up strapped to a table being drained of blood so that her brother can prove he's a "real" man and do some rescuing. She is sent (disguised as a boy) to be sold in the "boy mart" which is all survival of the fittest and bully boys, but they cunningly penetrate her disguise so she's packed off to the "girl mart" at which slaves are sold off in girly frocks and no underwear, which makes sense only if every adult is a sadistic heterosexual paedophile

Or take Margaret Weis' energetically but clumsily plotted star wars saga which lurches through a second episode in *King's Test* (Star of the Guardians, volume two, Bantam, £4.99). Sagan turns to Maigrey and fires a lasgun at her. Kazam – end of episode. Cut to a paragraph and half a second later – "I trust your weapon was set on stun?" anticlimax. Cut to two pages later and the same episode from Maigrey's viewpoint – "she had just seconds to alter her electromagnetic aura to absorb the impact of the stunning ray" ... I mean, shortears, why not just go for "with one bound she was free" and cut out a couple of pounds? Another of those intergalactic Roman empires whose entire populace consists of six major characters and the odd planet of extras, and where everyone can quote opera, Earth music and *The Lord of the Rings* and talks a lot about having met strange beings that look like bad broccoli but in fact encounter nothing but English-speaking New Yorkers. Oh, and with quotes at every chapter heading that irritated me profoundly after Chapter Seven's, which is misquoted and misascribed.

A shared world, "Forgotten Realms," is the background for *Song of the Saurials*, volume three of the Finder's Stone trilogy by Kate Novak and Jeff Grubb (Penguin, £4.50). If there's one thing more irritating than the "they were here already, they'd already met those guys, and then we just happened to be passing so we all joined up together to get the macguffin" plot it's the "we were all here but everyone was arguing about this and that so we all rushed off in different directions so that the entire plot has to do with getting us all back together again in the presence of the macguffin" plot, which is what this is.

The Mistress of the Jewels by Diana L. Paxson (Tor, \$4.99) is described as "The First Book of Westria" and is in fact two volumes in one, *Lady of Light* and *Lady of Darkness*, first published in '82. It's a Cinderella story, little mousy girl with a big thing about the burn scar on her arm, gets to marry the king and become the queen and wielder of the magic jewels. There's a nice look at the villain's descent from Close Personal Friend of the king to jealous rejected sorcerer but the heroine is infuriatingly colourless, the hero is a plot token and the villain gets all the best lines. Edward II in drag, without the sex, violence or poker.

In Terry Brooks' *The Druid of Shanara* (Orbit, £13.99) we follow Walker Boh and Morgan Leah as they follow some magic bimbo into a stone city to get the Black Macguffin back from Rodin's Thinker or a reasonable facsimile. They get to the city itself fairly quickly and then spend a lot of time wandering around getting grey and depressed as the city leaches life, joy

and hope from character and reader alike; and the "holding" chapters that explain the bad guys have got Col but not Par and that Wren is still looking for the elves but hasn't got very far yet are an unnecessary diversion: tell their story or don't. Next!

Barrow by John Déakins (Pan, £4.99) is a place but the novel which bears the title is in fact a collection of short stories with some linking material and reappearing characters. A powerful mage living incognito in Barrow is the linking narrator and his attempts at interference and non-interference in the locals' lives form the meat of the stories. A nicely worked out world; the next novel may be interesting, particularly if it is a novel.

Life on the Border (Tor, \$4.99) is a collection of short stories edited by Terri Windling about the border between the human and elfin worlds in a sort of post-holocaust scenario which appears to have been caused by the traumatic reappearance of elfdom. Elf and human kids run away from home to the anarchic area where the two worlds collide and magic works eccentrically: you can ride your wheelless Harley on magic but you'd better not fly too high. The combination of elf and punk is irresistible: this is what the universe ought to be like. The stories are all top class, and manage to use some of the same characters without any jarring effect; the whole thing fits together like a novel. More please – we elves could do with a paarty!

Note: the final paragraph was dictated to me, due to the involuntary transformation of the writer into an armadillo, an effect which is stress-related and usually of short duration. Ms Bradley will perforce be retiring from reviewing until the effect wears off, or a sufficient number of human publishers clap their hands and say "I believe in literature" to effect the reverse transformation.

(Deirdre Galadriel Bradley, elf-in-waiting)

Textbook Exercise in Plotting Ken Brown

David Drake's *The Jungle* (Tor, \$18.95) is a short novel set in the same world as "Clash by Night," a 1943 story by C.L. Moore and Henry Kuttner, which is also included in this volume. We are on Venus in the far future: Earth is long lost, most of humankind lives in undersea citadels, and mercenary Free Companies wage bitter war on their behalf against each other and against the nightmarish mutated life that infests the surface of the planet.

The *Jungle* is almost a textbook exercise in plotting. A shipwrecked crew have to make their way across the deadly surface of Venus to a place where they have a hope of rescue. The action is contained in 24 hours and a few minutes, with flashbacks explaining the personality and previous history of each crew member. At the end some of them survive, just. The protagonist is a standard hero, somewhat in the Hornblower mould, who welds his crew into a disciplined and motivated unit by a mixture of extemporised leadership (based on taking the advice of his men whilst appearing to give them orders), and extreme bravery. He of course thinks he is a coward, but he's too afraid of his own fear to allow his men to see it, so he does his job by the book and doesn't give them space to think of not doing theirs. At the end he resolves a guilty episode from his past, and comes to a beginning both in his personal life and for his society.

It's all very well done exciting stuff, worth a train journey and (to my taste) superior to the Kuttner original. But it isn't really sf. The story could have been set as well in almost any military unit, and the details (all that "barakite" and those "spigot mortars") would have been better for it (real research is one thing, invention another – but copying someone else's invention?). The apparent sf setting is a fantasy landscape, fears of the jungle magnified. There isn't any science or speculation in it. A slab of ecological common sense might have made it work. Big fierce animals are notoriously rare and I can't easily make the leap of imagination into a place where they are abundant. It might have been fun to be given reasons for it, to have some attempt to save the phenomena of this imaginary world, rather than merely take it as given. As it is the story might have been better set in Guadalcanal rather than Venus.

And *All the King's Men* by Gordon Stevens (Pan, £4.99) is another "England Invaded" story. Laced with real characters, it is a straightforward and long-winded adventure hooking an alternate second world war together with the personal history of a little man who becomes a leader in the English resistance. It's all very well, but I got more out of reading a history of the real war a few days later.

By contrast, *The Devil's Advocate* by Andrew Neiderman (Legend, £3.99) is a truly bad book. Kevin Taylor, an ambitious young lawyer, successfully defends a lesbian child-abusing liberal infant teacher he knows to be guilty (Neiderman is nothing if not redneck in his choice of hate-figures: we know she's a lesbian because she "shares a house on the outskirts of Blithedale with her girlfriend... and neither went

out with men"). He is then booted out of his job, but offered a place with a New York firm run by a certain John Milton, who later turns out to be the devil. He is placed on a number of unsavoury cases, in each case to defend the guilty.

It all gets too much when (surprise, surprise) the devil turns out to be sleeping with the wives of the lawyers (all male, of course; the women in the team are for decoration, cooking and childrearing) in order to father a human child. The hero rebels, tells an assistant DA and a priest of his suspicions, and they persuade him to murder Milton. When the case comes to trial, they are revealed to be in league with the devil, and Taylor is sent to prison for life, where he finds himself using his legal skills to defend his fellow prisoners, amongst whom is the devil in another incarnation.

I only tell you the entire plot so that you won't be tempted to read this truly pointless book for yourself. It falls down as horror, continually failing to surprise or shock, containing nothing that would remotely horrify (or excite) anyone who remembers, say, *Rosemary's Baby* or *The Exorcist*. It also fails as a story. Unoriginal, wooden, and slow-moving, I can honestly say there are no surprises, twists, turns or unexpected revelations. The overwhelming feeling (if you can use a word like "feeling" about such grey flatitude) is of a book you've read before with all the good bits left out. All that remains is a sort of budget soap-opera naff lifestyle. Milton's penthouse with a view of the Manhattan skyline has a marble fountain, a grand piano with a gold candelabra and a cream shag-pile carpet; Taylor's idea of a celebratory meal is "an English chophouse famous for its rack of lamb and home-made trifle." There is also a subtext of paranoia, pandering (like *The Enforcer* or *Dirty Harry*) to fears that the guilty walk free and that They are everywhere.

Even the title is a cheat. Neiderman's diabolic law firm defends the guilty, yet we all know that the "Devil's Advocate" of the Catholic church was the prosecutor, in keeping with the Biblical Satan, who is after all the Accuser. Biblically, the good guy is the redeemer, the counsel for the defence, someone who gets you out of trouble even when you deserve to get into it. If you are given a copy of this book for free, use it to prop up a wobbly shelf.

It was a relief to turn to Jack Vance's *Ecce and Old Earth* (Tor, \$21.95; sequel to *Araminta Station*), a perfectly rounded science-fiction detective story. When I picked the book up for the first time I thought it would be overlong and tedious to read, written in a deadly serious straight style, slightly old-fashioned and whimsical

at the same time, not really sf other than in its interplanetary setting (which is used mainly as an endless source of odd people and confusing societies). Then I started reading, got hooked, and found all of my preconceptions to be true, except the bit about "tedious." There's even an unambiguously happy ending, achieved by a plot device so obvious you wonder why it wasn't thought of on page fifteen of the previous volume, saving everyone the bother. A good read.

But now on to fantasy. *Cup of Clay* by Carole Nelson Douglas (Tor, \$19.95) is yet another novel in which an apparently "normal" citizen of our world is transplanted by some magical means into a fantasy land in which she turns out to be a person of unusual importance – in this case a "Taliswoman" (whatever that is). It is as competently done as one could hope, and the coconut-shy men of the alternate world are cleverly set up to be knocked down by our heroine. And yes, there is a "map." It is an impressionistic perspective view that is of no use whatsoever in helping one follow the story. This is the first part of a series.

The Falcon and the Serpent by Cheryl Smith (Minstrel/Monarch, £4.99) is a long and explicitly Christian book. An evil sorcerer has made his dupe the ruler of a small pagan kingdom and orders him to make war against a more godly one nearby. Both the sorcerer and the chief warrior of the good-guy's kingdom were once in love with the same woman, who, unknown to either of them, is still alive in some sort of retreat in the wilderness. Everything turns out all right in the end, after an awful lot of campaigning and an awful lot of religion. As an evangelical Christian, I've never seen the point of books like this. It's all too easy to invent a religion that's just enough like Christianity – or for that matter Islam, Buddhism or atheism – and have it solve all the problems of your characters. There is no exploration here, very little thought about God or belief, just the depiction of invented characters having their lives changed.

I could have done with a map. The plot turns, more than once, on how many days it takes to ride from A to B, or the manoeuvrings of armies. I couldn't form a picture of the country so I lost out on some of the events. And I have a difficulty with these names. It's just not on to have people called Temrane, Hoen and Crotalus (guess which one is the evil sorcerer) in the same fantasy world as Duncan and McNyre, not with out some explanation. It's a sign of the author not doing her homework.

I don't want to do these books down too far. They are competently written and both have some element of suspense and excitement (especially the Douglas). Perhaps I am just jaded. I

cannot get into this stuff, I can't shake the feeling that I have read it all before.

Terry Pratchett tells us exactly why we've read it all before in **Witches Abroad** (Gollancz, £13.99), the latest (twelfth?) of his Discworld books. Stories, we are told in an introduction to narrative causality that makes the book worth reading on its own, exist independently of their tellers. They are the computer viruses of the human mind, parasitical life forms that bend the lives of innocent people to their predetermined form. "A thousand heroes have stolen fire from the gods ... It is now impossible for the third and youngest son of any king, if he should embark on a quest which had so far claimed his older brothers, not to succeed." Someone, somewhere in Discworld is encouraging stories, cultivating them, domesticating them, selectively breeding them, feeding them. What stories eat is people's lives. Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg and young Magrat the novice Fairy Godmother are sent on a quest to cheat a particularly nasty story by preventing Ella (guess who) marrying the prince of the fantastical city of Genua, which has something in common with New Orleans.

The plot is a typical Discworld farago – or rather a gumbo or melange because Discworld goes Cajun and Creole. The jokes hit you at about three to a page and all the old Pratchett tricks we are used to are there – bathos, mock-heroism, scholarly footnotes, and, centrally, references that ought to be lost on the people of the world we are reading about. Here we meet amongst others Little Red Riding Hood, the Sleeping Beauty, the yellow brick road, Snow White and a large chunk of soul food washed down with Daquiri.

And it works. It's bloody good. Read it and laissez les bon temps rouler.

Michael Moorcock's **The Revenge of the Rose** (Grafton, £13.99) isn't in the same class, but it probably went to the same school. Elric of Melniboné is back (did I really read all the Eternal Champion books as a teenager?) and is unleashed on the Multiverse to meet a number of strangely familiar people including the Gypsy Nation (dedicated to endless movement, progress and pursuit of property prices), various heroes and demons from other Elric books, and the poet Wheldrake who may or may not be from Putney and may or may not be the author. Baroque, thoughtful, not entirely serious and more than worth reading.

I am painfully aware as I write these fantasy notices that I am less impressed by Smith and Douglas, who are simply telling stories (with various degrees of skill and originality), than

by Pratchett and Moorcock, who have withdrawn very far from that position. Their books make no real pretence to be set anywhere other than here or anywhere other than now; they are slightly conceited books, cynical but humanist, nice books, pleasant books, gently post-modernist, fantasies for people who have spoiled their imaginations by feeding them too much story when young.

But it is still possible to get away with a good story, if you can do it well enough. Marion Zimmer Bradley can. She writes about real people and real stuff. Between apocalypses her characters have doubts, babies and hangovers. If not the Dickens of sf, she is perhaps its Arnold Bennett. But she also writes good, fun stories. The latest addition to the Darkover series is **The Heirs of Hammerfell** (Legend, £3.99). Not of the first water, but it is a good read (the best ones are *The Shattered Chain*, *Thendara House* – ignore the naff Peter Andrew Jones cover art on the UK Legend edition; art editors are notoriously illiterate – and *City of Sorcery*).

Set in the "hundred kingdoms" period of Darkovan history, the new volume shows Bradley, as always, in command of her material and her language. Like Cheryl Smith, she mixes silly names with Earthly ones like "MacAran" and "Aillard." But she does it deliberately and with purpose. Her characters comment on the resemblance of Darkovan names to European ones (not in this novel but in *The Bloody Sun*, written earlier, set 300 years later). The language is part of the story, not something added on to it.

Bradley sprays plot items around with an offhand mastery (I'd rather say "mistressy," but I'm not sure it's an English word) that shows she's drunk from that same old spring of story. We have a vendetta a century old, love affairs between the heirs to the two feuding houses, desperate escapes, one of the spear-carriers gets to yell "Ha, ha! So ends Hammerfell!" (as this is only page 54 we know it probably doesn't), twins are separated in childhood (yes, they each fall for the same woman), a dog remembers her master after 17 years (and dies to save him, arrow through the throat, no less), there are murders in the theatre, mobs, burnings, riots, marriage vows not quite taken because the guest of honour has a stroke at the critical moment, and a heap of the good old MZB running subtexts about women needing a real job rather than just looking after children, sexual ambiguity (very off-stage in this one) and, of all things, agricultural clearances. (Typically for Bradley her dukes and petty princes actually have to make a living out of their estates, they never just have an endless supply of wealth to draw on).

The Darkover series as a whole is certainly sf – much more so than most apparently techier space operas. But this book is, if anything a historical novel, written in the imaginary past of MZB's imaginary future. I read it in one go. (Ken Brown)

UK Books Received October 1991

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anthony, Piers. **Isle of View**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-55363-9, 344pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; the latest in the never-ending "Xanth" series; the accompanying publicity describes it, rather oddly, as "the fourth book in the trilogy", is the word "trilogy" ceasing to have any meaning, and is Piers Anthony single-handedly responsible for this?; actually, it's the 13th volume in an open-ended series.) 7th November.

Anthony, Piers. **Robot Adept**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-42932-6, 286pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; there is a simultaneous mass-market paperback edition [not seen]; sequel to *Out of Phaze* in the "Apprentice Adept" series.) 21st November.

Asprin, Robert. **Myth-Nomers and Im-Pervections**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-981090-5, 200pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; eighth in the "Myth" series.) 7th November.

Bear, Greg. **Heads**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-971480-9, 117pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novella, first published in 1990; it was serialized in *Interzone* 37-38.) 7th November.

Blish, James, with J.A. Lawrence. **Star Trek: The Classic Episodes 1**. "1991 The 25th Anniversary Editions." Introduction by D.C. Fontana. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-29138-6, 646pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe sf omnibus, first edition; contains 27 stories, based on the original TV scripts, which presumably first appeared in four slim volumes by Blish; the individual stories and prefaces are copyrighted 1967-1977; this is the US "Bantam Spectra" edition with a British price sticker.) 14th November.

Blish, James. **Star Trek: The Classic Episodes 2**. "1991. The 25th Anniversary Editions." Introduction by David Gerrold. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-29139-4, 647pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe sf omnibus, first edition; contains 25 stories, based on the original TV scripts; the individual stories are copyrighted 1967-1977; this is the US edition with a British price sticker.) 14th November.

Blish, James, with J.A. Lawrence. **Star Trek: The Classic Episodes 3**. "1991. The 25th Anniversary Editions." Introduction by Norman Spinrad. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-29140-8, 627pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-

universe sf omnibus, first edition; contains 24 stories, based on the original TV scripts, the individual stories are copyrighted 1967-1977; Spinrad's introduction is particularly interesting; this is the US edition with a British price sticker.) 14th November.

Brenchley, Chaz. **The Garden.** Hodder/Coronet, ISBN 0-340-55189-5, 351pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in 1990.) 17th October.

Brenchley, Chaz. **Mall Time.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-52827-3, 287pp, hardcover, £14.99 (Horror/suspense novel, first edition.) 17th October.

Brooke, Keith. **Keepers of the Peace.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13724-3, 252pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 48.) 14th November.

Brooks, Terry. **The Scions of Shannara: Book One of The Heritage of Shannara.** Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4899-0, 502pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; originally published in British mass-market paperback last year, this is the third Orbit printing; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 40.) 7th November.

Brosnan, John. **The Fall of the Sky Lords.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04556-6, 284pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1991; third in the "Sky Lords" trilogy; this mass-market edition follows very soon after the hardcover.) 24th October.

Cadigan, Pat. **Synners.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21147-0, 435pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 24th October.

Campbell, Ramsey. **The Count of Eleven.** Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-20216-X, 374pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror novel, first edition.) 14th November.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Midnight Sun.** Futura, ISBN 0-7088-4857-5, 312pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by Mark Morris in *Interzone* 41.) 14th November.

Chalker, Jack L. **Soul Rider, Book Two: Empires of Flux & Anchor.** Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-012315-6, 320pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1984.) 31st October.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Gentry Lee. **The Garden of Rama.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05169-8, 398pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition [?], third in the "Rama" sequence.) Late entry: 26th September publication, received in October.

Cohen, Jon. **Max Lakeman and the Beautiful Stranger.** Transworld/Black Swan, ISBN 0-552-99441-3, 208pp, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous novel, first published in the USA, 1990; is it a fantasy? - we're not sure, but it has an attractive Mark Harrison "woman-in-a-jungle" cover, and it comes with commendations from fellow-Transworld authors Mary Gentle and Terry Pratchett.) 14th November.

Constantine, Storm. **Burying the Shadow.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0404-7, 404pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 13th February 1992.

Cooper, Louise. **Avatar: Book 6 of Indigo.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21338-4, 299pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 24th October

Cramer, John. **Twistor.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-55117-2, 370pp, paperback, £4.99, (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 32.) Late entry: July 1991 publication, received in October.

Daniels, Les. **Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics.** Introduction by Stan Lee. Virgin, ISBN 1-85227-359-3, 287pp, hardcover, £30. (History of the Marvel Comics company; first edition [i.e. simultaneous with US edition]; copiously illustrated in full colour, it's a large plush volume with a substantial text.) 31st October.

Del Rey, Lester, and Risa Kessler, eds. **Once Upon a Time: A Treasury of Modern Fairy Tales.** Illustrations by Michael Pangrazio. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-4993-X, ix + 342pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1991; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; contains all-new stories by Isaac Asimov, Terry Brooks, C.J. Cherryh, Katherine Kurtz, Anne McCaffrey and others; the full-colour illustrations are striking.) 14th November.

Duane, Diane. **High Wizardry.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-52651-7, 236pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; third in the trilogy which began with *So You Want to Be a Wizard*.) 14th November.

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **A Bad Day for Ali Baba.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0392-X, 280pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1991; proof copy received.) 7th November.

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **The Other Sinbad.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3639-9, 375pp, paperback, £4.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 49.) 10th October.

Greenland, Colin. **Take Back Plenty.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21339-2, 528pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1990; winner of the 1991 Arthur C. Clarke Award and the BSFA Award for best sf novel; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 40.) 24th October.

Haffner, Katy, and John Markoff. **Cyberpunk: Outlaws and Hackers on the Computer Frontier.** Fourth Estate, ISBN 1-872180-94-9, 368pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Study of computer hackers, first published in the USA, 1991; it has cover commendations from Messrs Gibson and Sterling, but otherwise seems to have little connection with sf; it just goes to show that the science-fiction field has lost control of the word "cyberpunk" - it has now entered common parlance; see also the entry for Andrew Ross's book *Strange Weather*, below). Late entry: 26th September publication, received in October [thanks to Oxford Times reviewer Brendan Wignall for passing this item on to us].

Hand, Elizabeth. **Winterlong.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40317-6, 440pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; a debut book, it comes with cover commendations from Terry Bisson, Storm Constantine, Samuel R. Delany, George Alec Effinger, James Morrow, Pat Murphy and Lewis Shiner.) 14th November.

Hardy, Phil, ed. **The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction.** Illustrations by the Kobal Collection. Revised updated edition. Aurum Press, ISBN 1-85410-159-5, 478pp, hardcover, £30. (Chronological encyclopedia of sf movies, the earlier editions appeared in 1984 and 1986; all the new entries for films of the last five years or so have been written by Kim Newman; this is an impressive and beautifully illustrated volume, highly recommended.) 28th November.

Harrison, M. John, and Ian Miller. **The Luck in the Head.** Gollancz/VG Graphics, ISBN 0-575-05037-3, unpaginated, trade paperback, £8.99. (Graphic novel, first edition;

there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; the second title in Gollancz's new graphic line; it's based on one of Harrison's existing "Viriconium" fantasy short stories.) 24th October.

Hartwell, David G., ed. **The Dark Descent: The Medusa in the Shield.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21429-1, 607pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1987; this is the second volume of the British mass-market paperback reprint; the three volumes of this edition originally appeared as one massive tome in America.) 24th October.

Hawke, Simon. **Batman: To Stalk a Specter.** Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-015499-X, 249pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-world fantasy [?] novel, first published in the USA, 1991; "Simon Hawke" is a pseudonym of Nicholas Yermakov; apparently this is the second "Batman" novel to appear from Penguin this year, but we weren't sent a copy of the first one, *The Batman Murders* by Craig Shaw Gardner.) 31st October.

Jones, Gwyneth. **White Queen.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04629-5, 312pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition; it bears some relationship to her story "Forward Echoes" which appeared in *Interzone* 42, although that piece was not a pre-publication extract.) 24th October.

Jones, Stephen, and David Sutton, eds. **Fantasy Tales.** "Vol. 13. Issue No. 7. Winter 1991." ISBN 1-85487-064-5, 186pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy magazine in book form; first edition; contains mainly new stories by Ramsey Campbell, Adrian Cole, Garry Kilworth, Samantha Lee, Thomas Ligotti and others.) 28th October.

Koontz, Dean R. **The Eyes of Darkness.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0435-7, 307pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror/suspense novel; first published in the USA under the pseudonym "Leigh Nichols," 1981.) 3rd October.

Koontz, Dean R. **Hideaway.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0481-0, 307pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition [?], proof copy received; the new book from "the internationally bestselling master of menace whose worldwide sales now exceed 70 MILLION COPIES"; it seems to be a mystery-thriller about the afterlife and angels and stuff - judging from the blurb, somewhat like Brian Moore's excellent *Cold Heaven* [not to be confused with Koontz's own *Cold Fire*].) 2nd January 1992.

Laws, Stephen. **The Frighteners.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-55450-3, 461pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 41.) 21st November.

Laymon, Richard. **Blood Games.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0454-3, 311pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?], 1991; proof copy received; Laymon is an American writer, but Headline seem to have adopted him with enthusiasm, and it's possible that their editions of his books are the world first editions.) 5th March 1992.

Laymon, Richard. **One Rainy Night.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3549-X, 410pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1991.) 10th October.

Lee, Tanith. **Dark Dance.** "First in the Blood Opera sequence." Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-20253-4, 409pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; this appears to be a "Gothic" item, marketed as mainstream, from a talented author who remains remarkably low-profile [in this, her native country], considering she has published some 44 books.) 13th February 1992.

Lofficier, Jean-Marc. **Doctor Who: The Terrestrial Index.** Virgin/Target, ISBN 0-426-20361-5, 247pp, paperback, £3.50. (Listings of "Doctor Who" material in all forms; first edition; covers television, films, plays, radio, records, videos, games, novels, comics, etc., about the BBC-created character and his science-fictional universe.) 21st November.

McCaffrey, Anne, and Elizabeth Moon. **Sassinak: Volume One of The Planet Pirates.** ISBN 0-7088-5243-2, 333pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 52.) 28th November.

Maddox, Tom. **Halo.** Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3670-6, 216pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 55.) 14th November.

Marley, Stephen. **Mortal Mask.** Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-5109-8, 404pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; set in ancient China, this is a second novel by a British writer whose first, *Spirit Mirror*, was published by Collins/Fontana.) 12th December.

Pratchett, Terry. **Moving Pictures.** "A Disc-world Novel." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13463-5, 333pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 45.) 14th November.

Rhodes, Daniel. **Kiss of Death.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-55201-2, 261pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990; "Daniel Rhodes" is a pseudonym for Neil McMahon; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 42.) 7th November.

Robinson, Nigel. **Timewyrm: Apocalypse.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20359-3, 201pp, paperback, £3.50. (Shared-universe sf novel, first edition.) 17th October.

Ross, Andrew. **Strange Weather: Culture, Science, and Technology in the Age of Limits.** "The Haymarket Series." Verso, ISBN 0-86091-567-0, 275pp, trade paperback, £10.95. (Study of "the culture of prediction," first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; the blurb describes it as "a manifesto which calls on cultural critics to abandon their technophobia and contribute to the debates which shape our future"; it sounds very interesting, and with chapter titles like "Getting Out of the Gernsback Continuum" and "Cyberpunk in Boystown," it obviously owes a good deal to sf.) 31st October.

Rucker, Rudy. **Transreal!** Introduction by Robert Shekley. WCS Books [PO Box 4674, Englewood, CO 80155, USA], ISBN 1-878914-00-6, 535pp, trade paperback, \$15. (Sf and non-fiction collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous limited hardcover edition [not seen]; this hefty volume appears to contain all Rucker's stories, poems and essays to date, including the entire contents of the previously published collection *The 57th Franz Kafka*; the small-press publisher is Andy Watson, who used to co-produce *Journal/Wired* – now apparently defunct after three issues.) Late entry: summer (?) 1991 publication, passed to us in October by Gamma, "the Unlimited Dream Company," who has imported copies for sale in the UK (see our Small Ads for further details).

Russo, Richard Paul. **Subterranean Gallery.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21229-9, 344pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; this book by an as-yet little-known author won the 1990 Philip K. Dick Memorial Award.) 7th November.

Shaw, Bob. **Terminal Velocity.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04917-0, xvii+160pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Sf novel, first published as *Vertigo* in 1978; this revised and retitled edition adds as a prologue the 1975 short story "Dark Icarus.") 24th October.

Sherman, Josepha. **The Shining Falcon.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13700-6, 341pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; it's inspired by Russian history and the operas of Rimsky-Korsakov.) 5th December.

Simmons, Dan. **Summer of Night.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3653-4, 634pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 46.) 14th November.

Sisman, Adam, ed. **The Best of Fortean Times: The Journal of Strange Phenomena.** Foreword by Lyall Watson. Illustrations by Hunt Emerson. Futura, ISBN 0-7088-5335-8, 192pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Non-fiction compendium of titbits on the weird and wonderful; first edition; it's a sort of cross between the *Sunday Sport* and the *Guinness Book of Records*, and takes its sanction [and title] from the early-20th-century American compiler of out-of-the-way facts, Charles Fort.) 28th November.

Somtow, S.P. **Moon Dance.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05072-1, 564pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 46.) 24th October.

Straczynski, J. Michael. **OtherSyde.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3617-8, 405pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 10th October.

Thomas, Elizabeth Marshall. **The Animal Wife.** Fontana, ISBN 0-00-617915-0, 384pp, paperback, £4.99. (Prehistoric sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; a follow-up to the same author's *Reindeer Moon*, it comes with praise from Joseph Campbell, Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy, John Updike [!] and others.) 7th November.

Thurston, Robert. **Bloodname: Legend of the Jade Phoenix, Volume 2.** "Battletech." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-015242-3, 287pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-world sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 7th November.

Watson, Ian. **The Flies of Memory.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05163-9, 220pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 46.) 24th October.

Watt-Evans, Lawrence. **The Unwilling Warlord.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21149-7, 349pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; it's possibly a sequel to the author's earlier books *The Misenchanted Sword* and *With a Single Spell*, but the publishers don't make this clear.) 7th November.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman, eds. **Dragonlance Tales.** "Collector's Edition." Illustrated by Steve Fabian. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-015742-5, 698pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Shared-world fantasy omnibus, first published in the USA, 1991; the contents originally appeared in three separate volumes entitled *The Magic of Krynn*, *Kender, Gully Dwarves*, and *Gnomes and Love and War*, all 1987.) 7th November.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **Elven Star: The Death Gate Cycle, Volume 2.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40266-8, 367pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 49.) 5th December.

Womack, Jack. **Heathern.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21342-2, 255pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 41.) 10th October.

Wood, Bridget. **The Lost Prince.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0291-5, 440pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *Wolfking* [?]; proof copy received.) 9th January 1992.

Wright, T.M. **The School.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05028-4, 245pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) Late entry: 26th September publication, received in October.

Yamashita, Karen Tei. **Through the Arc of the Rainforest.** Macdonald/Scribners, ISBN 0-356-20322-0, 212pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; the blurb describes it as "probably the only novel narrated by a sphere the size of a golf ball that whizzes around the head of a Japanese expatriate in Brazil... Part fairy tale, part soap opera, it is also a biting satire on cultural confusion, political insanity and the rape of the earth.") 14th November.

Overseas Books Received

Bonanno, Margaret Wander. **Otherwhere.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-06433-0, 317pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *The Others*.) 21st November.

Garcia y Robertson, R. **The Spiral Dance.** Morrow, ISBN 0-688-10902-0, 227pp, hardcover, \$20. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the American author, whose first name is Rodrigo, is described as being of "mixed Hispano-Celtic background"; this novel, his first, is set in Elizabethan Northumbria and Scotland, and comes with commendations from the likes of Andre Norton, Jane Yolen and Roger Zelazny; portions first appeared as novelettes in *F&SF*.) 22nd October.

Greenberg, Martin H., ed. **After the King: Stories in Honor of J.R.R. Tolkien.** Introduction by Jane Yolen. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85175-8, 456pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; contains original tales by Poul & Karen Anderson, Peter S. Beagle, Gregory Benford, John Brunner, Charles de Lint, Stephen R. Donaldson, Patricia A. McKillip, Barry Malzberg, Andre Norton, Terry Pratchett, Mike Resnick, Robert Silverberg and others; a strong line-up, but it's odd to see the names of Benford and Malzberg in there: neither are in the least identified with fantasy.) January 1992.

Harrison, Harry. **A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!** Tor, ISBN 0-812-51591-9, 254pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *Tunnel Through the Deep*, 1972; the preferred British title has been restored for this Tor Books mass-market edition.) October.

Heinlein, Robert A. **Requiem: New Collected Works by Robert A. Heinlein and Tributes to the Grand Master.** Edited by Yoji Kondo. Preface by Virginia Heinlein. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85168-5, 341pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf and non-fiction collection, first edition; proof copy received; contains the well-known title story and the novellas "Tenderfoot in Space" and "Destination Moon," plus various other writings by Heinlein [mainly non-fiction, speeches, etc.]; a third of the book is taken up by tributes from the likes of Poul Anderson, Greg Bear, Tom Clancy, Arthur C. Clarke, L. Sprague de Camp, Gordon R. Dickson, Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, Spider Robinson, Robert Silverberg and many others; the praise for this major sf author, who died in 1988, gets more and more fulsome: "He was admired and envied for more than half a century, by the brightest human beings on Earth," according to Niven.) February 1992.

Jordan, Robert. **Conan the Destroyer**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51401-7, 271pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1984; a sequel-by-another-hand to Robert E. Howard's "Conan" tales; it doesn't say so here, but this one is evidently a novelization of the movie of the same title.) October.

Jordan, Robert. **The Great Hunt: Book Two of The Wheel of Time**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51772-5, 707pp, paperback, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 44.) October.

Lackey, Mercedes. **Jinx High**. "A Diana Tregarde Investigation." Tor, ISBN 0-812-52114-5, 314pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Horror/mystery novel, first edition; third in a series which began with *Burning Water* and *Children of the Night*.) October.

McAllister, Bruce. **Dream Baby**. "A Novel of Vietnam." Tor, ISBN 0-812-51098-4, 434pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf/war novel, first published in 1989.) October.

Mecklem, Todd, and Jonathan Falk. **The Liquid Retreats: Short Fiction**. Illustrations by Roman Scott. Wordcraft of Oregon [953 N. Gale, Union, Oregon 97883, USA], ISBN 1-877655-03-1, 43pp, paperback, \$6.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; this the fourth in the "Speculative Writers" series of small-press booklets produced by David Memmott; it has a cover commendation from Don Webb [who also has a collection forthcoming in the series].) Late entry: "Summer 1991" publication, received in October.

Modesitt, L.E., Jr. **Dawn for a Distant Earth: Volume 1 of The Forever Hero**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51613-3, 340pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1987.) October.

Norton, Andre, ed. **Grand Masters' Choice**. "The best stories by the all-time greatest SF writers." Introduction by Robert Bloch. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51619-7, xxiv+355pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first published in 1989; contains well-known stories by past-winners of the SFWA's "Grand Master" award, including Asimov, Clarke, de Camp, Heinlein, Leiber, Simak, Williamson and Norton herself.) October.

Rich, Mark. **Lifting: Six Short Stories**. Illustrations by Gregorio Montejo. Wordcraft of Oregon [953 N. Gale, Union, Oregon 97883, USA], ISBN 1-877655-02-3, 57pp, paperback, \$7.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; some of Rich's stories have appeared in *New Pathways* and other semi-professional sf magazines; this is the third in the "Speculative Writers" series of small-press booklets produced by David Memmott; it has cover commendations from Brian Aldiss and Brian Stableford.) Late entry: "Summer 1991" publication, received in October.

Rogow, Roberta. **FutureSpeak: A Fan's Guide to the Language of Science Fiction**. Foreword by C.J. Cherryh. Illustrations by Leah Rosenthal. Paragon House, ISBN 1-55778-347-0, 408pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Dictionary of sf terminology, first edition; sadly, this book has its inadequacies: the subtitle would have been more accurate if it had read "A Trekkie Filksinger's Guide to Fannish Jargon.") Late entry: 30th September publication, received in October.

Shwartz, Susan. **The Grail of Hearts**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85176-6, 308pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's about a female Wandering Jew in search of the Holy Grail, and the publishers describe it as "sure to be a breakout book for this multitalented author.") February 1992.

Sheckley, Robert. **Immortality Inc.** "Basis for the movie *Freejack*." Tor, ISBN 0-812-51931-0, 250pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf novel,

first published in 1959; this was Sheckley's debut novel, although he had already produced several collections of short stories at the time.) October.

Simmons, Dan. **Song of Kali**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51592-7, 311pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1985; co-winner of the World Fantasy Award.) October.

Womack, Jack. **Ambient**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51605-2, 278pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1987; this was Womack's first book.) October.

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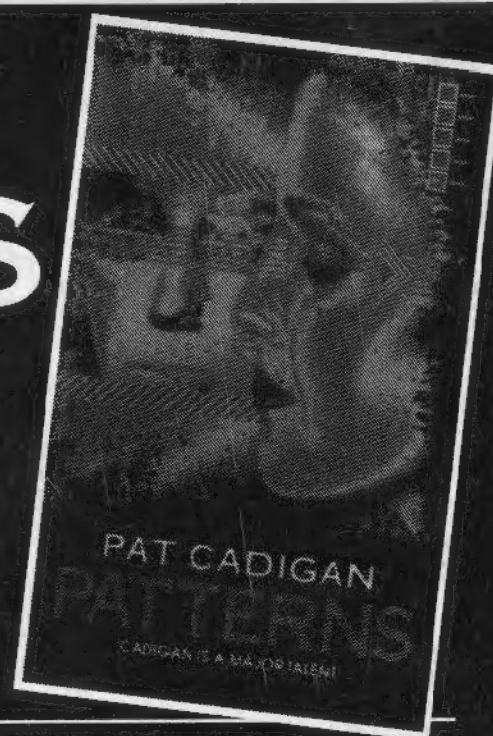
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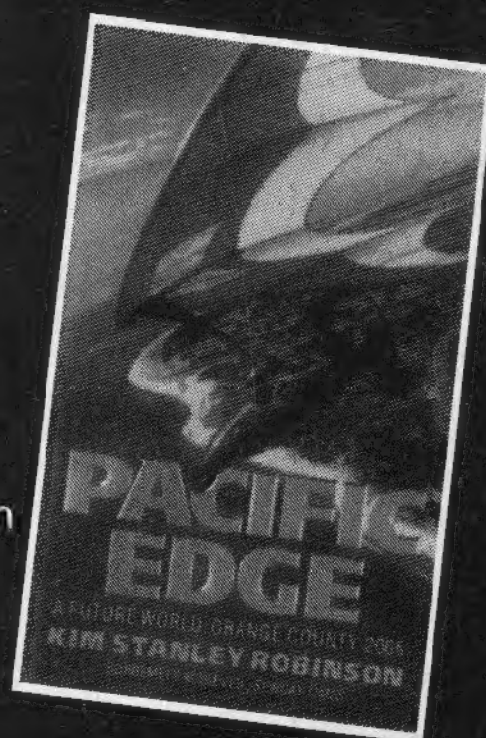
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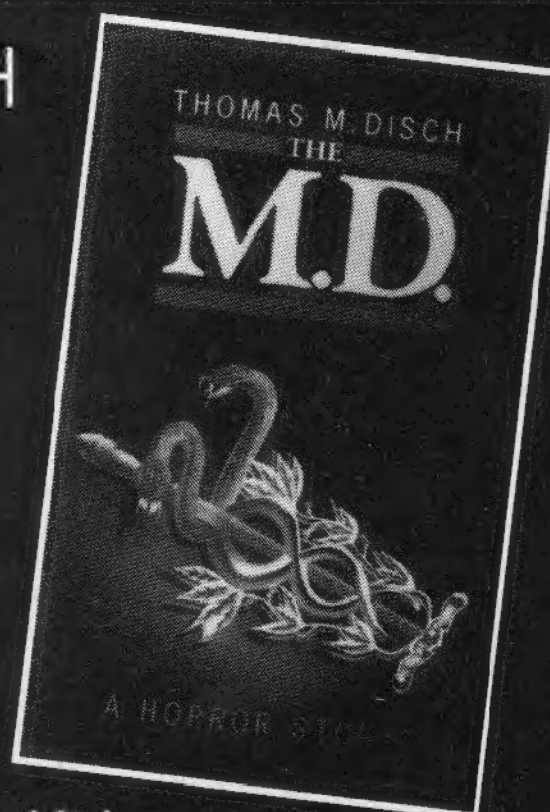
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